

The Changing Paradigms And Evolving Dynamics Of Faith-Based Tourism In India

Dr. Aruna Dhamija

Abstract: The religious sector has been such that it has attracted a lot of visitors to the places of interest such as shrines and dwelling places of deities in a large number since times immemorial. With time, the same has been shaped in a manner that it has evolved to the concept of spiritual tourism wherein the visiting religious believers are treated on the lines of tourists owing to the notion that they are looking for ways in which their religious visit could be touted on the lines of a holiday along with fulfilling the religious purpose for which it is being undertaken. The present paper proposes various concepts in this regard and highlights how the sector has evolved with the coming together of locals and tourists along with tour operators to provide memorable religious visits with an overview of a tour where the religious tourists is provided with all the amenities which they could avail giving them a feel of comfort and luxury in the place of hardship in terms of visiting such destinations which were quite difficult to reach. The paper also explore the ill-effects arising out of spiritual tourism and how the same could be kept in check.

Key Words: Religion, Tourism, Marketing, Spirituality, Paradigm, Dynamics, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality is viewed synonymous to religion, owing to the interchangeable usage of the words "spiritual" and "religion". Spiritual tourism is about people visiting places to explore the life's meaning and attainment of peace with the help of self-realisation as well as transformation of self; not necessarily driven by a single faith or religion. On the contrary, spiritual tourism, is all about engaging devotees, in their individual capacities or in the form of groups, the purpose being embarking on a pilgrimage or to go temple-visiting or similar religious places. Also, as per it, there exist numerous rituals and practices adherence to them is expected of by the followers. A spiritual tourist has been defined as "someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without over religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experimental in nature, but within a Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling" (Haq and Jackson, 2009).

Religion

In order to bring upon a varied level of knowledge towards religion tourism, it becomes essential to comprehend what religion signifies. Richards (2007) defined religion as "a system of beliefs in a higher being that are held with great faith and commitment. There is a universal belief in a higher being in all religions." Religion characterizes a unique perspective set comprising beliefs which are out of this world and responses which are attached with them thus giving outcome to the elementary questions of human existence. These definitions have, in effect, left atheism beyond the purview of religions. The religions can be categorized into ten significant beliefs which have can be viewed as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, western esoteria, the modern religions, Neopaganism, Sikhism and Taoism.

2. SPIRITUAL TOURISM: THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

It is difficult to define spiritual tourism on the virtue of various authors providing their own version of literature pertaining to tourism hence leading to such nomenclatures as pilgrimage tourism, religious tourism, spiritual tourism and cultural heritage tourism which are used interchangeably. The logic behind synonymous usage of religious and cultural travel is the simple reason that cultural tourists, on their part, also go to religious sites which are very much a part of their visiting schedule thus leading to the nomenclature of spiritual tourists. In the present study, the author is concerned with religious tourism, whereby travel is being seen as a religion-only activity and not having anything to do with culture. Hence, not much attention would be given to the vast expanse of heritage or cultural tourism. As per Norman (2011), pilgrimage could be seen as panacea for all sorts of issues in one's life and can correct wrongs committed by an individual. Vijayanand (2013); MacCannell (1999) have given a social phenomenon angle to pilgrimage travel with the sacredness of the place being of paramount importance and one of the constants of religious importance across different faiths. When one talks about research in the area of tourism, spiritual tourism hardly finds mention in the same. This is nothing but amusing for the reason that it is the most nascent type of tourism as per Timothy & Olsen (2006). This is true for the case of India as well which is having a good tourism heritage and religious circuit thus providing a promising platform for the present study. As per Novelli (2005), spiritual tourism can be viewed as a part of cultural tourism. Niche tourism and mass tourism are the two headings which are classified under tourism. Novelli (2005, 2) mentions mass tourism as "large-scale phenomenon, packaging and selling standardized leisure services at fixed prices to a mass clientele". Alternatively, niche tourism caters to the groups which are specifically defined wherein the individuals have specialized interests or needs related to specific items. It is further divided into five sectors. At the same time, cultural tourism is viewed as micro-niches. (Novelli, 2005, 2-9.) Pilgrim sites are also viewed as places which sometimes go a bit astray from the original purpose for which they are known (Tyraowski, 1994). Van Gennep's 'rite de passage' provides us with the means of evaluating the consecrated sojourns of one

- Aruna Dhamija, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, India - 281406, +918006644202. E-mail: aruna.dhamija@gla.ac.in

devotee with the other, along with comparing the related rituals and processes (Aziz, 1987). Noy (2004) examines inter-relationship between self-change and narratives originating from travel in a manner that romanticist and semi-religious are viewed as the two major discourses in religion. Hasan (2010) are of the opinion that no other tourism aspect could be equated with spiritual tourism for the simple reason that the taste and class of a spiritual tourist are vastly different from a regular tourist. (Haq & Jackson, 2009) in their work, talk about the Hajj pilgrimage of spiritual tourists from the countries Pakistan and Australia and how the experience and expectations of the devotees is taken into consideration by those catering to spiritual tourism at the holy shrine.

3. SPIRITUAL TOURISM: THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

India, undoubtedly is one of the oldest civilizations globally thus having the presence of and influenced by virtually every major religion which has found traction in the world. Although Hinduism has come to be identified with a majority of the populace, other religions have found their reckoning as well. Such religions as Sikhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Judaism despite having a niche following have made their mark too in the Indian religion context. By the virtue of being a secular country, each individual in India enjoys the right to live out the religion as per own beliefs. Few prominent religions practiced in India are Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity, Muslim, Jainism, Buddhism, Parsi, and Zoroastrianism. The believers of Hindu religion visit temples, Sikhs visits to the gurudwaras, Christians to the churches, Muslims to the mosques, Jains visits specific Jain temples, and Buddhists, Parsis and Zoroastrians do visit to spiritual places, as per their value system and beliefs. Some devotees visits to their religious places on a regular basis, and a good number of people who holds strong religious viewpoint and a sense of commitment do travel from one corner to other corner of country. Ajit (2004) is of the opinion that there exist differences in the structures of various segments as an industry be it in terms of pilgrimage rituals, the way they observe their festivals and they care for their heritage thus providing varied inputs to those offering spiritual tourism as a concept to the different religious communities in the country. As per Shinde (2015), Vijayanand (2013); the human history is replete with the pilgrim's interest having a material perspective as they view spiritual tourism akin to other types of tourism. Bajpai (1954) puts the notion of leisure-oriented travel on spiritual tourism wherein recreation is a part of the entire process. Spiritual tourism in the Indian perspective can have two differing views; one, the domestic tourist and their faith having a spiritual connection leading to the destination or the deity as per their religious concerns; the foreign tourist comprises of the other one who may be from an altogether different geography (or not) who are enamoured by the novelty aspect of the religious customs or the destination itself, looking for a different experience than theirs on the top of the ethical principles on similar lines. There lies a fine line which separates belief from business as far as the domestic market is concerned. The contemporary socio-economic norms are such that places of worship like temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras are assets (tangible ones) owing to the infrastructure or the workforce

which characterizes them thus leading to the implication that the place of worship has to monetize itself to ensure the survival of all those who are associated with its societal environment. Spiritual tourism could be divided on the basis of such aspects as the product characteristics, intensity and region of travel in the following: Pilgrimages, Faith-based cruising, Missionary travel, Fellowship vacations, Crusades, conventions and rallies, Monastery visits, Retreats, Guest-stays, Religious tourist attractions, Faith-based camps.

4. PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Spiritual tourism is undertaken for numerous purposes in India:

For Offering Prayers – Majority of those who undertake pilgrimage or go for spiritual tourism, do so as an extension of their acts towards worship. They believe that by doing so their wishes and desires would come to fruition. It is firmly believed in many, in fact most of the religions that a person with sound conditions, both health and wealth-wise, should at least once pay their respects to the most famous shrine.

For Exploring Harmony and Inner Peace – People in India believe that the benefits of spiritual tourism can often be viewed as harmony and inner peace being promoted. Disputes and conflicts of all sorts could be resolved by with the help of religion. This is quite significant for the simple reason that there is nary a household where conflicts are not a part of the day which is sadly quite disappointing as well as unsavoury. Spiritual tourism planning could help in overcoming such unpleasant situations thanks to the promotion of congenial and agreeable environment, peace and individual relationships. Thus, promotion of harmony and peace are surely one of the reasons why individuals undertake spiritual tourism.

For Confessing Sin, Expressing Gratitude, and Performing a Vow – Every individual, at one point or the other, feels guilt for past sins and seeks penance for the same. Visit to a holy place features right at the top for this purpose. The Hindus firmly believe that taking a bath in the Holy river of Ganges would absolve them of their sins. The religious people believe that confessing for their sins, expressing gratitude or simply performing a vow at the designated religious places would lead to well-being and forgiveness for past ill doings.

Achieving Spiritual and Social Salvation – In every society, piety is considered to be fulfilled in the form of religious rendezvous. The Hindus believe that they need to accumulate upon religious merit by visiting their places of worship. The Buddhists, believe that such visits invariably lead to enlightenment. In many religions, it is considered obligatory for the senior most members to perform religious travels as a mark of them retiring from active social life.

Celebrating and Commemorating Religious Events – Festivals hold a certain place of prominence in India. Every religion has distinct festivals where they celebrate by worshipping deities, visiting religious destinations, decorating their places, observing fasts and in certain instances, by planning spiritual tourism. For the Hindus, Diwali is the major festival during which they visit religious places to pay their respects. The heritage ghats situated in the holy city of Benaras come alive during the festivities of Diwali and are visited by those who want to celebrate the festival there along with lively aartis. Enriching Knowledge

level – Many educational institutions have taken initiative towards introducing programs and courses focused on religion as the mainstay. Work is carried out by researchers in the form of studies or projects highlighting the importance of religion, religious education importance, spiritual tourism and so on. Knowledge pertaining to religion can be enhanced by exploring various scriptures. Deep knowledge and comprehension related to religion, if desired by individuals for academic purposes, could be done with the help of spiritual tourism where the individual learns through architecture, history, and other aspects which would enhance their level of knowledge. Establishing a Dialogue with Religious Leaders– Spiritual tourism is characterized by establishing a dialogue with religious leaders which takes places with regard to perspectives and viewpoints pertaining to faith. There exist such religious places in the country which the individuals believe would fulfill their desires and needs thus leading to their involvement in efficient communication with the others. Involvement in religious acts makes a person believe that they can attain the coveted objective of life to themselves as well as for the family.

5. IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Religion on its own, may be viewed as a notion which leads to lot of emotions in India and is open to interpretation by many. At the same time, it is this very notion which brings the country together from one part to the other. As compared to the relatively one or two religion dominated nations globally, surprisingly India is home to a multitude of religions ranging from Hinduism (almost 80% of the population follows it), Islam (the second-largest practiced religion in the country), then there are the religions such Jainism, Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism which are followed by different segments of the society. People following all these religions are bound together by their tolerance and understanding for each other thus making India a basket case of religious co-existence. This fact is very much evident when marketers target various religious activities, events, festivals or gatherings across the nation. Mega-events like the Kumbh mela of Prayagraj attract swathes of people from the globe and the same is kept into consideration by the marketers. Such religious destinations like Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan, Shri Saibaba Temple in Shirdi, Maharashtra; Catholic Church in Goa, Bodh Gaya in Bihar, Bankey Bihari Temple in Mathura-Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine in Katra, Jammu & Kashmir are some of the prominent locations in the country which devotees of various religions make a point to visit and are hot-spots for marketers. These are ideal grounds for them to push through their products at minimal costs. Those having an interest in developing such product which are religion oriented keep into consideration the requirements of the visitors who come visiting during different points of time as per their convenience and auspicious occasions. As per Shanthakumari (2017), there have been concerted efforts on the part of the developers to come up with exhibitions, theme parks, bird watching, interpretation centres, water sports, recreational spots, boat rides which mix pleasure with religious visits thus developing as a one-stop destination for the entire family and only for the religious-oriented ones. It also promotes

the ethnic and local products which are preferred by the visiting spiritual tourists. The importance of spiritual tourism could be gauged from the fact that it helps in generating new opportunities for employment for the locals who were previously engaged elsewhere. Capacity-building is the prime example of how employment is generated in such places. This promotes the spirit of entrepreneurship among the locals who benefit from the influx of spiritual tourists more than anyone else thus leading to economic vibrancy and diversity at once. Various headings under which locals benefit from spiritual tourism range from religious leaders, preachers, priests and others. These individuals, in turn, are expected to enrich their knowledge and awareness related to the local religious attraction and also abide by with the traditions, values, beliefs, principles as well as norms and standards prevalent.

6. CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Spiritual tourism facilitates development related to the fundamental infrastructure amenities, enables consistent source of income for the locals on the virtue of them being a part of the process. It also balances out the development ploys which are regional in nature on the virtue of authority effect. At the same time, it also leads to socio-cultural bonhomie thereby nurturing peace. Diversification of tourism could result from the introduction of novel activities underlying the tourism definitions. It also is necessary to regulate the unbridled development of tourism in a given territory. There are certain factors pertaining to apposite organization and structure which play their part as well as regulation in spiritual tourism is concerned. Shanthakumari (2017) is of the view that to develop spiritual tourism in an effective manner, following preventions are to be effected:

Carrying Capacity Infringement – almost every major religious destination in the country experiences an intense period when the number of spiritual tourists visiting it grows exponentially thus altering the demographics of the place. As per Gokhale (1986), having poor infrastructure causes major problem for the spiritual tourists. The Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj is one such example when 24 crore people visited the holy city over a period of 49 days in 2019. The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand is yet another example in this regard. May marks its beginning and November its culmination. During this period, there is immense pressure on local transportation thus creating lot of concerns in the region of Garhwal. The situation becomes alarming especially during Monsoons, a period which is characterized by frequent construction of roads and landslides. Thus, such environmental concerns as landslides pose a detrimental effect on the regional balance thus raising questions on unchecked development of a spiritual tourism destination to satiate the ever-growing demands of the spiritual tourists.

Waste Management – widely regarded as an important aspect related to creating awareness in individuals in numerous areas, for example, recycling. The waste generated due to tourism travelers is overwhelming. It has become a cause for concern with regard to managing the waste being generated after such mega events which see a deluge of devotees visiting religious destinations for a

period of time. The management becomes challenging as in many instances the local authorities don't possess such requisite infrastructure which may be necessary to deal with this menace.

Pollution – Pollution cannot be avoided as a topic when one talks about spiritual tourism for the simple reason that wherever there is a surge of human populace, pollution is bound to follow. There are four types of pollution which act as a deterrent wherever one goes, them being water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution and land pollution. Water pollution is a serious issue of concern wherever there are rivers and lakes which are considered pious by a certain religious community. For instance, the holy river of Ganga is considered sacred in Hindu community. Hence it is visited by crores of devotees wherever it flows. Poor planning and surge in number of devotees on a regular basis make it quite challenging to keep it clean. It creates a lot of problems for the individuals who drive their source of living from the river. Likewise, when one talks about air pollution, the situation is pretty grim in the places being flocked by the spiritual tourists during the peak season owing to the constant vehicular movement. Dumping of waste materials and filling of land due to the same is another serious issue which needs much attention at religious places as a result of the spiritual tourists not taking proper care with regard to sensible disposal of wastage. Dusty and overcrowded roads are a major struggle for those planning a visit to these religious destinations. But the problem is that they are the very reason that such issues arise. Yet another issue in this regard is the noise pollution which is caused due to the flourishing of industries, construction sites, machines, blaring of horns and loudspeakers and other instruments in the places frequented by spiritual tourists.

Tendency to Monetize Religion – As per Shantakumari (2017), there exists a dire need to regulate the financial management as done by the various religious trusts and committees which leaves a lot to be desired. Regular reports appear which highlight the blatant mismanagement which goes in the name of trusts and committees at these religious destinations. Even the local administration is to be found indulging in such activities thereby giving their tacit consent in such nefarious activities. Stringent legal conditions are required to check such a blatant misuse of funds which are redirected in such activities which go against the very purpose for which the donations are made. Such a legal provision makes it even more significant keeping in wake the fact that some of the religious trust and committees are one the wealthiest in the world. Thus it becomes all the more imperative to ensure that the financial resources at the disposal of these religious bodies are used properly.

7. THE UPSIDES OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM

It is indeed an uptick for any nation, and her underlying states, to benefit from the upsides of tourism and when the same takes shape in the form of spiritual tourism, the stakes become higher. This holds particularly true for those nations which boast of such destinations which are of significance for the followers for a particular religious belief. Such countries witness a robust footfall of the followers and

believers of a particular religion round-the-year in most of the cases though there are notable exceptions as well like the Kedarnath shrine in Uttarakhand state of India whose pats (doors) open for a limited window of time every year. That said, it is imperative for any nation to understand the significance of spiritual tourism in terms of boosting the financial state of the country.

Spiritual Tourists Ensure the Big Bucks

In the US, the most advanced and largest economy in the world, almost 25% of the public travel is some sort of faith-based tourism or pilgrimage thus signifying its importance in the public domain. This number further goes up when one considers the traveling which is done for the purposes of attending such faith based activities as conventions, bar mitzvahs, weddings or even funerals. Today, religion-based traveling is one of the largest and fastest growing segments of the travel industry. Saudi Arabia, Israel and Italy have been modeled as major faith destinations which attract vast crowds and have developed huge parallel economics solely on the basis of people who undertake pilgrimage to these places.

Positive Influence of Spiritual Tourism

One of the biggest positives arising out of spiritual tourism is the creation of employment opportunities wherein locals get engaged in various activities linked to it. This holds particularly true for the women. Spiritual tourism opens up new vistas for carrying various types of activities which hitherto didn't exist. Tourists collaborate with the locals for the purpose of conservation and restoration of historic sites. Such initiatives generate revenues for the local administration as well in the form of tourism tax, parking, etc.

The Multiplier Effect

It is quite obvious to understand that the visits made by the spiritual tourists spans across various sectors and lead to creation of jobs as well as revenues even in those sectors which are not influenced or influence them directly. This is so because even though they are quite different from the outlets which are directly dependent upon spiritual tourism, they benefit from the revenue generated by it.

8. THE DOWNSIDES OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Nothing is free from shortcomings and spiritual tourism is no exception to the same. Many times the locals complain that due to the unchecked flow of spiritual tourists in their cities leads to unexpected and unwarranted rise in prices of even the essential commodities thus leading of spiraling of prices in an uncontrolled manner. This unchecked inflow also leads to increased strain on resources like water, electricity. Also, the influx of spiritual tourists leads to increase in the municipal budget, rise in the prices of real estate thus adversely impacting the purchasing power of the ordinary citizens. In some instances, the cost of living in such places become so unsustainable that there is no option other than moving out for those who couldn't afford to live in such places.

Influence of Spiritual Tourism on Local Populace

Spiritual tourism invariably leads to enhanced costs in connection with a town or city which is visited by the

spiritual tourists. Expenses are incurred on such civic activities like collection of garbage, making the destination visible, proper disposal and distribution of water and other amenities like electricity thus adding to the expenses of the local and regional administration. On the other hand, there is an increase in the price of real estate such as flats and land pieces. Competition becomes quite high for the locals to survive. Then there is the case of concern related to safety and security for which the locals have to commit towards assistance and insurance for the spiritual travelers.

THE CHANGING PARADIGM OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Participation by Governments

It has dawned upon the Indian government that it is quite significant to revitalize the various holy sites, monuments and religious destinations for the economic significance which they make. For this purpose, the government has ensured path breaking initiatives thereby encouraging spiritual tourism at the domestic front. Moving it forward, the government has developed full-fledged spiritual tourism and spiritual circuits along with robust transportation amenities such as airports, railway stations, roads along with setting up a National Mission for Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) thereby encouraging and promoting spiritual tourism. All this has led to development centred around villages and towns along with urbanization at those areas which have spiritual significance. The Ministry of Tourism in India lends entire support towards improving the convenience along with better accessibility especially during such events as pilgrimage tours. The state of Uttarakhand has started the Char Dham Yatra by helicopter as one such initiative which enables the elderly and infirm to undertake pilgrimages to such shrines as Kedarnath and Badrinath. For the spiritual tourists visiting Kedarnath, it is great initiative keeping into consideration the rough terrain and tough tracks of around 18 km which used to be the only access to the shrine. On similar lines, shrines such as Manimahesh, Vaishno Devi and Amarnath have also saw the advent of helicopter routes. This reflects well on the tourism-friendly approach as being exhibited by the Government of India and its Ministry of Tourism.

Shrine Boards and their Initiatives

No stones are being left unturned by the authorities as well as boards of popular shrines in order to facilitate pilgrimage of a high standard. They are taking extra initiatives for those coming from the far flung places. Websites are created and maintained to ensure that the spiritual tourists get complete picture about the place and/or deity. Online booking of darshans, helicopter rides, live darshans, VIP darshans, Prasad (offering), tickets, aarti are also being done. Many other initiatives are being taken by such authorities as Tirupati Balaji, Vaishno Devi which ease the visiting spiritual tourists. The nation of India has been in the reckoning for spiritual tourism for quite some time and these initiatives are in the right direction thus exhibiting the cultural paradigm of the country.

Luxury with Spirituality

Dharamshalas are not being preferred by the financial well-off spiritual tourists who are willing to pay extra for availing

facilities which are linked to their visiting these religious destinations. They are comfortable with booking luxury hotels, VIP tents during Kumbh Melas, resorts which offer world-class services, all this at a top-notch price which they don't mind. Same has been noted by several prominent hospitality names such as Lemon Tree, Carlson, Country Inn, Sarovar Hotesl which are some of the known luxury hotel chains who have found it quite a lucrative opportunity to cater to the redefined choices of the visitors.

Guided Tours and Customized Packages

Domestic as well as foreign tourists visiting India, now-a-days, prefer tour operators who are knowledgeable and experienced. This is on the account of the package deals which are crafted by these well-known tour operators who keep the itinerary of the spiritual tourists in their mind well in advance. The packages are designed in a manner that they cater to every whim and fancy of these demanding spiritual tourists who don't settle for the second best which is evident from the exorbitant sums which they are ready to splurge on such expensive things like helicopter rides to travel to shrines as Badrinath, Vaishno Devi and Kedarnath which are quite difficult to reach otherwise. In the case of the domestic spiritual tourists, things have become promising thanks to the steady rise in their disposable income and the rise and rise of the middle class which has more money to splurge than ever before and spiritual tourism fits right in their scheme of things. They are able to cut on the time and efforts which they would have to put in case they opted for the traditional mode of visiting these far flung and difficult terrains. The tour operators are a dedicated lot who do all the planning and executing on behalf of their customers, of course for a hefty fee, be it the booking of rooms, cabs, restaurants, tickets, darshans, aartis, meals, you name it. They also provide the best of the amenities to their clients and visits to the nearby bazaars and events.

Marketing Bonanza for All

Reaching out to the right set of customers is the ultimate Holy Grail for any marketer who covets the attention of them. Spiritual tourists fit in the bill of many such marketers who are inclined towards serving them well. There have been company sponsored religious events wherein organizations like Birla group, Ramco traders have pitched in with their efforts to woo the spiritual tourists with their schemes, amenities and freebies thereby registering themselves in their mindscape. Many MNCs pitched in with their brands during the recently concluded mega religious event of Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj. The promotion of the products at these ultimate destinations for the spiritual tourists has been the cornerstone of such organizations who promote their products at prominent locations at the minimal costs. They set up food stalls for free, provide accommodation, potable water, medical services and other amenities to reach out to the spiritual tourists in an unprecedented manner which bodes well for the companies looking for an innovative manner in which they can execute their marketing plans thereby ensuring their maximum reach. The mind space generated by such activities is huge and goes a long way towards ensuring better recall factor for those organizations who engage in such activities.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present paper centred around the theme of spiritual tourism and how the same has evolved with time. The impact of the same in the socio-economic prosperity in the country has been increasing with time. In many instances it has been found that the overall contribution made by spiritual tourism in the local economy is even higher than the contribution of exports being made by that region. When it comes to competing with the developed countries or even states, the lesser developed countries and states have comparative, if not competitive, advantage on the virtue of the location of a shrine or deity at that place thereby ensuring a steady stream of spiritual tourism flocking to that destination every year, year after year thus making a huge contribution in the upliftment of the living condition of the locals. Especially the money earned from foreigners provide such countries the much-needed foreign exchange which they could use towards Balance of Payment issues. Further, such foreign exchange, if properly utilized, could usher a new era of prosperity and development for the respective nation. The present paper also brought forth the point that, spiritual tourism, if properly managed, could lead to a better living to the unemployed and semi or unskilled work force. The standard of living of the locals can see a drastic shift towards betterment if spiritual tourism is employed in a better manner. At the same time, unchecked and unbridled development of shrines and religious destinations could also bring things to a difficult phase especially for those who are directly affected due to the side effects such as increased levels of prices, pollution and other ills. Hence, a balanced approach is necessary to ensure a sustained level of spiritual tourism in a nation. Further the paper talked about how the marketing bonanza which could result owing to spiritual tourism is being utilized by many companies who utilize their presence in a big manner during such religious congregations like Kumbh Mela. What essentially is to be done is that there should be a concerted effort towards ensuring a balanced approach wherein the visiting spiritual tourists and the locals collaborate together to find such sustainable means by which they can benefit from each other rather at the cost of each other.

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