

Chapter 4.4

Sustainable Development of Pilgrimage Tourism in Jammu Region: An Investigation of Rural Residents' Attitude

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a socio-economic activity and has evolved into one of the largest and fastest growing industries of the world. While the economic benefits of tourism are well known, the research evidence indicates that the benefits of tourism are rarely equitably distributed among the key stakeholders. In this context, sustainable tourism development (STD) as a long-term approach development aims to balance social and economic objectives with environmentally sound management. The sustainable development as a strategic tool requires a process of planning and management that brings together a series of interests and stakeholders' concerns in the form of planning and development. Therefore, keeping in view the importance and relevance of stakeholder cooperation for sustainable tourism development, and the residents being the key stakeholders, this research examines the rural residents' attitudes towards the impacts of the pilgrimage tourism. The results of the research points out that the sustainable development is important for responding to the current problems as caused by tourism development, as well as to address the needs of future generations.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a socio-economic activity and has evolved into one of the largest and fastest growing industries of the world. While the economic benefits of tourism are well known, the benefits of tourism are rarely equitably distributed among stakeholders in traditional tourism development. These economic benefits also come with environmental and cultural costs that are unfairly borne by some stakeholders (Mortz, Ray, & Jain, 2005). The shift from this traditional tourism model towards sustainable tourism development ensures equitable distribution of benefits and costs among stakeholders. Jamal and Getz (1995) argue residents are important stakeholders whose participation is necessary to move towards sustainable tourism. The residents should have an interest in making tourism development more sustainable, as it would help in balancing the demand for natural resources between residents and tourists. Understanding residents' perceptions are critical to fairly distributing costs and benefits of tourism; develop favourable attitude for participation and cooperation thus, ultimately increasing sustainable tourism development (Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002).

Tourism in the J&K has been an important part of the economy for several decades. Over one crore tourists and pilgrims visited Jammu and Kashmir in 2009, among them 96.84 lakh were "pilgrim tourists" with the Hindu cave shrines in the state witnessing highest footfalls. Of the total pilgrim traffic to the state, cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi in the Jammu region witnessed more than 90 percent of the pilgrims, accounting to 82.35 lakh pilgrims in the year 2009 which has increased from 1.4 million in the year 1986. Jammu is a region of intense rural zones with Katra as a base camp to cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi that have a high proportion of the touristic facilities in the entire state. Katra at an average elevation of 754 metres (2,474 feet) has population of 9106 according to the GeoNames geographical database. As

of 2001[update] India, census Katra population comprised 53% of males as against 47% females. The regional economy has become dependent on tourism for its contribution to GDP, income multiplier besides employing residents directly or indirectly with the industry.

Ironically, the touristic development along with the modernization of the pilgrimage's infrastructure has led to varied impacts leading to the degradation of the natural, cultural and social environment of the Community. Murthi and Kumar (1989) in a study observed that the problem of mass tourism is closely related with the issues of environment conservation. The tourism problem, according to them is more pronounced in the Himalayan pilgrim centers especially Amarnath and Vaishanodevi, which are which are more ecological fragile with limited carrying capacities. It is therefore; very necessary that such areas of fragile beauty should be thoroughly protected after accessing their tourist carrying capacity, so that their ecosystem & associated ecological processes are not disturbed. For instance, both residents and tourists use touristic infrastructure, though tourists may use it more intensely. Rising tourist arrivals put increasing demand on the limited resources of the surrounding area that must also sustain residents that affects residents' reactions toward tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pilgrimage Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources

The mass tourism has often been likened back to traditional pilgrimage system. Most sociological and anthropological contributions to tourism studies assert that pilgrimages are perhaps the earliest form of tourism. A pilgrimage site is generally defined by the sanskrit terminology *tirtha*, the concept that offers the basis of a specialized travel designated by the concept of the pilgrimage. Since

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