

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN CITIES: A CASE STUDY OF BODHGAYA

¹Mridul Kumar, ²Dr. Shailendra Kumar Mandal

¹Research Scholar, ²Associate Professor

^{1,2}Department of Architecture and Planning, National Institute of Technology Patna

Email ID: ¹mridulk.ph21.ar@nitp.ac.in, ²shailendra@nitp.ac.in

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objective of this study was to explore the concept of sustainable tourism in the context of Indian cities, using Bodhgaya as a case study.

Theoretical framework: Numerous studies have been undertaken on various facets of sustainability, including its effects on culture, society, and the environment, as well as its perceived economic advantages. However, there is still much to investigate and learn about sustainable tourism in the core area of Indian cities.

Design/methodology/approach: The study utilizes a secondary data-gathering process where the data was gathered using various journals, books, newspapers, webpages, governmental databases, etc. The data is then analyzed using trend analysis.

Findings: The main results indicate that sustainable tourism can be achieved in Indian cities through community involvement, responsible tourism practices, and environmental conservation.

Research, Practical & Social implications: The study contributes by providing the various factors and implications of sustainable tourism in the cities of India. This will help government to make policies and drafts for increasing the adaptability towards sustainability for tourism sector in India.

Originality/value: The study contributes to the understanding of sustainable tourism in the context of Indian cities and provides implications for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities to promote sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, World Tourism Organisation, Economy, Bodhgaya, India

INTRODUCTION

The fastest-growing sector of the economy is tourism industry globally. Tourism development has its positive and negative impacts, and the negative impacts cannot be minimised without a sustainable tourism industry that prioritises people, earth, and profit. “The declaration of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development by the United Nations” (UN) seventeenth General Assembly makes this quite evident (World Tourism Organisation, 2019).

India has undoubtedly attracted the attention of the entire world due to its rich Heritage and its cultural diversity. Along with traditional tourism destinations with heritage, culture, and

pilgrimage, new areas within the sector have come up. Centers for alternative medicine, including centers for yoga, ayurveda, and other wellness practices also attract many tourists, especially foreigners. There is also a growing need for ecotourism, rural tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism and creative tourism, therefore tourism is expanding rapidly. The government is working hard to promote "Incredible India" which today is a brand to be reckoned with (Yoga and Wellness | Incredible India, 2023).

Tourism in India

The current trends and future predictions for India as a tourist destination are highly encouraging. As it has been seen, the Asia-Pacific region will see a significant increase in visitor arrivals in coming decades. South Asia's average annual growth rate as a proportion of foreign visitor arrivals is expected to reach 6% by 2030, which is the highest in all sub-regions. South Asia will therefore have the largest growth in international visitors by the year 2030 (UNWTO 2011).

Kumar (2021), in his thesis, "Sustainable Tourism Development in Pushkar Region of Rajasthan: An Analytical Study" mentions that the contribution of the visitor to India's overall exports in 2016 was 5.4 percent, or INR 1,529 billion. By 2027, this is expected to rise to INR 2,901 billion, or 6.8% of India's total exports. In terms of investment, travel and tourism made up 5.7% (INR 2,284 billion) of total investment in 2016. By 2027, this will rise to INR 4,149 billion (5.7 percent per annum over the next ten years).

According to Budeanu (2005), the tourism industry is a significant factor in human social life and is likely the source of the most significant migrations in history. According to Weaver (2004), the fact that tourism is growing spatially is the evidence that today any location on Earth's surface qualifies as a tourist destination. Thus, with the size and scope of the tourism industry regularly prompting huge movement, is certain to have a variety of negative consequences on the world that are referred to have tourist effects (Cohen, 1978).

According to McKercher (1993), "tourism carries with it the capacity to inflict both helpful and harmful impacts on hosts communities and hosts' environments." On one side, its rapid expansion and economic contribution to various economies around the world are significant; on the other, it has the potential to cause severe damage to countries' delicate environmental and social structures. The tourism industry's structural realities are a major factor.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainability in tourism is explained by the "World Tourism Organisation" (World Tourism Organization, 1998) as "it meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future...leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems" (UNWTO 2011).

In the study "Study on Performance Analysis of Tourism Industry and Sustainable Tourism in India with Special Reference to the Northern States of India", Idrees (2021) explains that

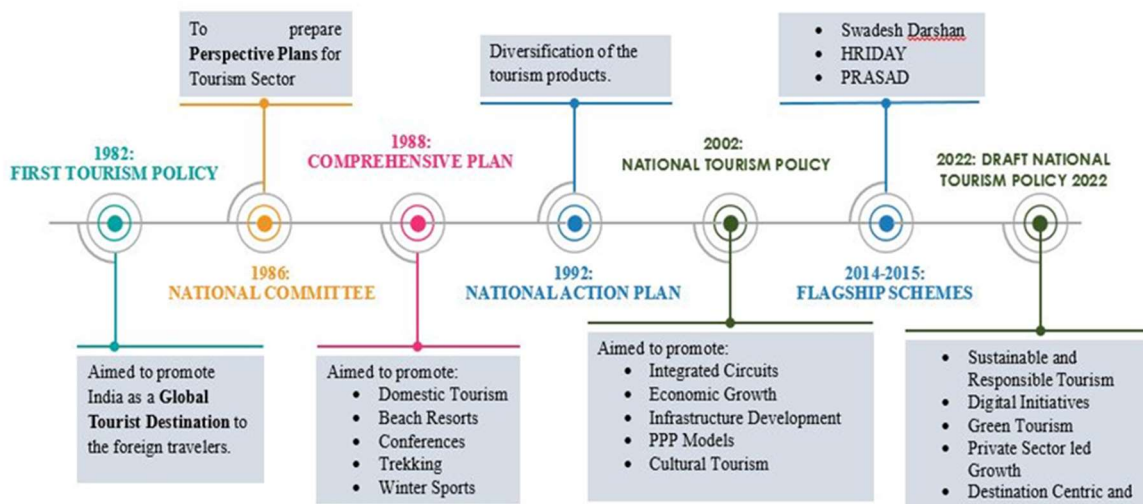
sustainable tourism development strategies can help all forms of tourism, including mass tourism and the numerous tourism segments. Sustainability principles focus on tourism's sociological, economic, and environmental aspects to ensure its long-term sustainability. It is important to recognise a good balance between these components. Therefore, sustainable tourism must:

- i. Utilise environmental strategies effectively to manage a significant component of tourism growth, support the maintenance of vital biological processes, and guard our world's natural heritage and biodiversity.
- ii. Maintain the constructed and enduring cultural legacy and traditional values of the host communities while paying attention to tolerance and acceptance of different cultures.
- iii. Achieve realistic long-term economic objectives, the fair distribution of socioeconomic aid to all parties, stable income-generating and employment opportunities, social care for local residents, as well as poverty reduction. (Idrees, 2021).

Policies

Tourism was considered to be a growing field in India and many efforts were made to promote tourism right after independence, but first formal policy of the Government of India focusing tourism was announced in 1982.

Figure 1: Growth of Tourism Policies in India



Source: Author

a) The first Tourism Policy (1982):

While hosting the Asian Games in New Delhi in the year 1982, India realised that the subsequent tourism connected with the game became the top source of foreign exchange and it formally announced its first formal tourism policy in November, 1982. The policy was launched with a mission to promote sustainable tourism as a means of economic growth and promote India as a global tourist destination.

b) Tourism development in the 1990s:

The designation of tourism as just an export business (with the implication of tax exemptions) as well as the establishment of the special public tourist financing company occurred in the 1980s as a result of the increased public interest in travel (1987). These programs were intended to quickly and publicly welcome private investors and business owners to take part in the growth of the tourist industry. The tourist organisation published a (new) National Tourism Action Plan in 1997, The plan's goals included expanding and improving the Indian tourism industry mainly by prioritising marketing, infrastructure development, as well as human resource development in addition to identifying a select number of areas for "integrated tourism development" in accordance with the above (thematic) tourist industry circuits. Some feel that the concept didn't provide anything new. It was just phrased in terms more relevant to today's development industry. Others said that the idea was impractical and overly ambitious. The funding was far from sufficient to meet the ambitious quantitative objectives.

Budgetary expenditures for tourism have never exceeded 0.2% since independence. The rise in Western travellers' preference for far-off, exotic places as well as recent improvements to India's overall outlook and worldwide reputation both contributed to the growth in tourism arrivals. The early 1990s market openness and the following rapid economic development have significantly altered its surface. India used to be automatically linked to slums and poverty. It is frequently represented in modern media as a fast-advancing economic superpower. The growing public interest in the industry has accompanied tourism's increasing economic importance and potential. A fierce competition between the states to draw investors to the tourism industry and other industries occurred with the opening of an Indian market. States began fighting for a share of both local and foreign visitors along similar lines. There was a push to maximise tourism development, especially within traditional tourist states.

In the 1990s, public policymakers began to understand the value of domestic travel. They concluded that it was a state government's (policy) concern and included it as a major topic in the 1997 Tourism Action Plan. International visitors were to be looked after by the central government. In the past, domestic travel was mostly reserved for religious and business purposes. Modernised domestic travel dramatically increased during the 1990s. This new occurrence is linked to a booming Indian economy as well as the Indian middle and upper classes' growing openness to western ideals of holiday preparation. Currently, a sizable number of Indian visitors visit the entire nation for largely mundane leisure and sightseeing-related activities. The advent of Indian travel publications and the increased explicit coverage of domestic tourism locations in top media serve as indicators of this new trend.

c) The new Tourism Policy (2002):

Eventually, the plan of action was transformed into a tourist strategy in 2002. The issue of tourism policy was formally shared by the national and state governments. The policy paper made the first effort to prove tourism's significant contribution to the nation's development as well as its function as a driver of growth. It indicated that tourism supports sustainable growth, high-quality

employment (especially among young people, women, and people with disabilities), harmony, understanding, as well as national unity and stability in addition to providing a government with revenue and foreign currency.

The concept was based on the notion that tourism may be utilised as a development instrument, producing high-quality, widespread employment and wealth for disadvantaged populations in underdeveloped areas. In more concrete terms, the policy seeks to increase both local and foreign tourism. The government suggested diversifying Indian tourism as well as significantly raising the standard of the industry to do this, right infrastructure, marketing, visa regulations, and air travel is needed. The strategy of using tourism for development mostly relates to domestic travel, which is theoretically related to "sustainable" rural development. In terms of foreign tourism, the Indian government is primarily interested in attracting the "high-yielding kind" of travellers. In conclusion, our tourist policies see the industry both favourably and dangerously. Tourism has to be regulated and steered by the government to keep it from becoming a danger. However, the conventional tourism, particularly long-distance luxury travel, is extremely advantageous. It only requires governmental facilitation since it affects such a significant source of employment and is also a development driver.

d) The National Tourism Policy 2022 (Draft):

It is a component of the New India vision, which has a strong development and prosperity trajectory. The new policy offers a comprehensive foundation for the nation's tourist industry's responsible and sustainable expansion. The policy's goals include supporting the travel and tourism industry, boosting related industries, and improving the framework conditions for tourist industry's growth. The plan, which is supported by a complicated institutional and governance structure, is comprised of eight strategic pillars, 5 national tourism missions, and six key guiding principles. The Policy will remain in effect for 10 years after it is announced, unless further extended. The Policy provides a thorough framework for guidance and direction for the development and enhancement of the sector. The policy mainly demands concurrent and coordinated action by a federal government, state and local governments, city municipalities, and industry players. The specific strategies, action plans, schemes, and guidelines that will be produced for the execution of the Policy from time to time will further outline the roles and duties of various stakeholders (Baken & Bhagavatula, 2010).

Certain tourism-related programs

a) Atithi Devo Bhava:

In 2005, "Atithi Devo Bhava" was launched to foster better ties between the host nation and overseas guests. The government had resolved to educate the populace on how to treat tourists, especially foreign visitors, after realising the value of the host community for a successful tourist experience (Chowdhury, 2017). The campaign "Atithi Devo Bhava" means 'God appears as a guest.' It was the Policy's goal to make the country appear, feel, and be perceived as inviting, safe, secure, and simple to explore. Attracting tourists depends on making them feel welcomed, thus

efforts had to be made to prevent hustling, cheating, and other forms of tourist harassment. The policy highlights the importance of "Atithi Devo Bhava - Guest is God" principles of old Indian heritage. To inform stakeholders and the public about the value of being welcoming to tourists, preserving cleanliness, hygiene, and safety, as well as acting responsibly, The "Atithi Devo bhava" brand has been used through television advertisements and other media sources (Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

b) Swadesh Darshan:

This scheme has been launched in 2014-2015 by Ministry of Tourism and Culture under which 15 thematic circuits have been identified to promote tourism and Buddhist Circuit is one of the most important circuits with Bodhgaya at its epicentre.

c) HRIDAY:

With the objective of preserving the heritage characteristics of a heritage city, the "Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)" was launched on 21st January 2015. Twelve cities are being developed under this scheme and Gaya (Bodhgaya is a satellite town of Gaya City and is 15 Km away from the center of Gaya) is a part of these 12 cities list.

d) PRASAD:

With the objective of harnessing pilgrimage tourism, "Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD)" was launched in 2014-2015 and aims to integrate pilgrimage destinations in a prioritized, planned and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience. Twelve religious cities are being developed under this scheme and again Gaya is a part of this list as it has important religious significance because of the "pind daan" (an important ritual of Hindus to pay homage to the departed soul). And since Bodhgaya is a satellite town just 15 km away from Gaya, it is going to get benefited from these schemes.

e) Green Tourism – Initiatives That Lead to Sustainable Tourism:

On April 29, 2022, the "Ministry of Tourism" released its "National Ecotourism Strategy." Tourism that can be sustained in its economic, social-cultural, and environmental contexts is referred to as "green tourism," sometimes known as "tourism in the green economy." Tourists, the host communities, industry, and environment - all have a role to play in making sure that sustainable tourism considers all of these issues (Farsari 2012).

f) Incredible India 2.0:

With an aim to promote various destinations and tourism products, Incredible India 2.0 was launched in 2017-18 and it focuses on Niche Tourism which includes spiritual, medical and wellness tourism etc., in potential overseas markets. The first version of the scheme focused on the generic promotion of tourism and tourist destinations; the 2.0 version of the scheme focuses specific promotions highlighting the USPs (unique selling property) of different destinations.

g) "Dekho Apna Desh:"

With an aim to promote the domestic tourism, the scheme was launched in 2020 and tries to encourage the domestic tourists to explore various destinations within the country itself through various promotional activities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Lane (1994), in his article "What is rural tourism?" people, rural development actors, politicians, non-governmental organisations, and government authorities have all been prompted and encouraged to look for new ways of producing as a result of agriculture and forestry's collapse. In addition to the changes in social and economic conditions, the concept of sustainable development has aided rural communities in their move towards tourism. It is an idea that has existed for a long time that tourism may be used to start implementing sustainable development on the local level.

According to Müller (1994) in his work- "The thorny path to sustainable tourist development" sustainable tourism is reinforced in policy papers, strategic plans, and academic literature on tourism. Despite numerous attempts to define the word, little research has been done on stakeholders' (Stakeholders include members of the local community, the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the tourism business, tourists, and many more groups) attitudes toward sustainable tourism. Some stakeholders may not be aware of how tourism is seen by other stakeholders, such as those who live near, utilise, or manage the resource being managed. That is because sustainable tourism, as it is practiced, is both initiative-taking and holistic in its approach to mitigating the short- and long-term effects of its activities. In addition, stakeholders in tourism have a stake in the quality of the product and want it to be top-notch. The opposite of sustainable tourism is referred to as "maintainable tourism," which is when the status quo is managed to stay up with short-term trends and impacts rather than extensively investigated.

According to Coccossis (1996) in "Tourism and Sustainability: Perspectives and Implications," By addressing both potential negative effects and physical degradation brought about by tourists such as the use of fossil fuels, water, and other natural resources. Sustainability is a strategy for reducing the effects of tourism on the environment. Because of the effective implementation of these procedures, tourism development does not deplete locally available non-renewable resources like physical and cultural resources. Sustainability in tourism refers to a set of concepts, key management techniques that direct tourism growth in a way that preserves a destination's natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Hunter (1997), in his work "Sustainable tourism as an adaptive paradigm" claimed that sustainable tourism is dynamic in nature as it is always being produced and renovated by many stakeholders. Knowledge and authority play an essential role in determining values and ethical judgments in a political context. Environmental sensitivity and economic efficiency and equity are at the heart of this discussion. He made a proposition that tourism has the potential to harm or promote these distinctive features that are so critical to sustainable development. As a result, incorporating tourism into rural products can help create jobs, boost local wealth, protect the

environment, and celebrate cultural treasures while also benefiting a broader cross-section of the population- economically, socially, and culturally.

According to Kearsley et al. (1998), in his article "Perception of wilderness in the South Island of New Zealand: A multiple images approach," people's and places' ideas about what constitutes "sustainable tourism" differ widely, according to the academic literature. Similarly, it is clear that the concerns of stakeholders are typically regional and contextual. Residents and business owners, on the other hand, were preoccupied with matters that directly impacted them, such as marketing and product design.

According to Augustyn (1998), in his paper "National strategies for rural tourism development and sustainability: The Polish experience," traditional methods of earning a living from crops or livestock are the most important sources of income. Alternative uses for local resources have become an unavoidable requirement for rural areas to stimulate their economies and create new jobs. Tourism is a viable option for improving rural community's quality of life and redistributing income in underserved areas thanks to its favourable effects on job creation and income generation. As a result of this widely held belief that rural economies require a resurgence, policies to promote tourism and recreation in rural areas have been developed. Conventional wisdom holds that one of the main forces behind economic growth in rural areas is tourism. Tourism may boost rural economies and open up new business opportunities for locally produced goods. Rural tourism has also been shaped by rustic-flavoured event tourism, which incorporates local products or cultural aspects.

When it comes to leisure & recreation supply and demand in rural tourism, Sharpley (2004), in his article "Tourism and the countryside," states that the idea of the multipurpose countryside "producing not only food but also sustaining rural landscapes, protecting biodiversity, generating employment, and contributing to the viability in rural areas is particularly prominent." It is now widely accepted that rural areas can no longer be treated as a homogeneous group because of the obvious flaws in the idea that rural areas can be addressed individually. "integrated and sustainable rural development" requires the expansion of agricultural product diversification, as well as innovation and value-added, both within the agricultural sector and outside of it, according to the European Commission. It is now widely accepted that agricultural land is an important public resource because it provides important ecological, aesthetic, and recreational benefits that were previously undervalued.

As per Weaver (2004), "sustainable rural tourism" can mean many different things depending on the context. Because of its oxymoronic nature and the ease with which it can be appropriated by proponents of various ideologies, it is recognised in the literature that the phrase "sustainable tourism" can refer to and support just about any type of development plan. Despite the common assumption that this word implies tourism that is also commercially viable and doesn't destroy those resources, tourism's future depends on the town's physical surroundings and social fabric. The result is a lot of strife among tourism-related organisations themselves as well as between and within each of those organisations.

By linking tourism and sustainability in rural areas, Hall (2005), in his work “Tourism: Rethinking the social science of mobility” argued that local economies can be sustained while the environment, on which the industry depends, is not damaged. Rural tourism must contribute to the economic and social well-being of the community, as well as to the development of other industries (e.g., by promoting local manufacturing).

BODHGAYA: AN UNATTENDED POTENTIAL IN TOURISM

Geary (2008) in his work “Destination enlightenment: Branding Buddhism and spiritual tourism in Bodhgaya, Bihar” stated that the “Mahabodhi Temple” in Bodhgaya was designated a “UNESCO World Heritage Site” in 2002. This distinction recognises the site's importance for both religious and cultural reasons. Bodhgaya is despite being its birthplace of Buddhism as well as a respected axis-mundi with all Buddhist sects; it is situated within one of India's most deprived and least developed states. Their material poverty as well as spiritual abundance coexists uneasily. Growing disagreements between stakeholder groups over site's development as a location for devotional practises or as a place for leisure and recreation have been brought on by the pilgrimage as well as tourism activities which have come as a result of town's status as a place of significance for culture and religion.

No group is spared from the attempt to develop the site since local residents, national and state governments, municipalities; foreign tourists are all intertwined in a network of related to the provisions as well as aspirations. Bodhgaya's social and physical landscape has changed because of this dispute, and significant questions about the community's sustainable and equitable growth have arisen.

Tourism and pilgrimage are important forces behind Bodhgaya's development and important local economic drivers. A subclass of foreign pilgrim-tourists known as eco-pilgrims, come to Bodhgaya to gain various capitals—the most significant of which is spiritual capital. The growth of Bodhgaya sustainably and equitably depends heavily on infrastructure issues. In the absence of vision and action from governmental agencies, NGOs and non-profit organisations are leading the way toward Bodhgaya's equitable and sustainable development (Geary, 2008). The main Mahabodhi Temple Complex area has been non-motorised for public and only battery operated electronic-rickshaws or rickshaws are allowed within that zone. But a very small example explains the whole story of the sustainability of tourism development of the place: the flowers being offered inside the inner sanctum (i.e. garbha griha of the temple) is being offered in polystyrene (thermocool) plates, and all these offerings are being dumped directly inside the Niranjana (Falgu) River with all those polystyrene plates, and neither the ULB nor any NGO or even the temple administration is doing anything about it.

Government Initiatives towards Buddhist Circuit

The Government of India is trying to tap the potential of various tourism or religious circuits and the Buddhist Circuit is one of the most important circuits. A joint study by the collaboration of the “Ministry of tourism, Government of India,” The Bihar and Uttar Pradesh Governments,

key players from the private sector, Buddhist monasteries and sects, and most importantly, International Finance Corporation (IFC, a World Bank Group) was done from 2014 to 2018 and various aspects of the Buddhist Circuit was accessed. The Buddhist Circuit identified by the World Bank study consists of the following towns: “Lumbini (Nepal)-Bodhgaya (Bihar)-Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh)-Nalanda+Rajgir (Bihar)-Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh)-Kapilvastu (Uttar Pradesh)-Vaishali (Uttar Pradesh)-Sravasti (Uttar Pradesh) and Kaushambi (Uttar Pradesh).”

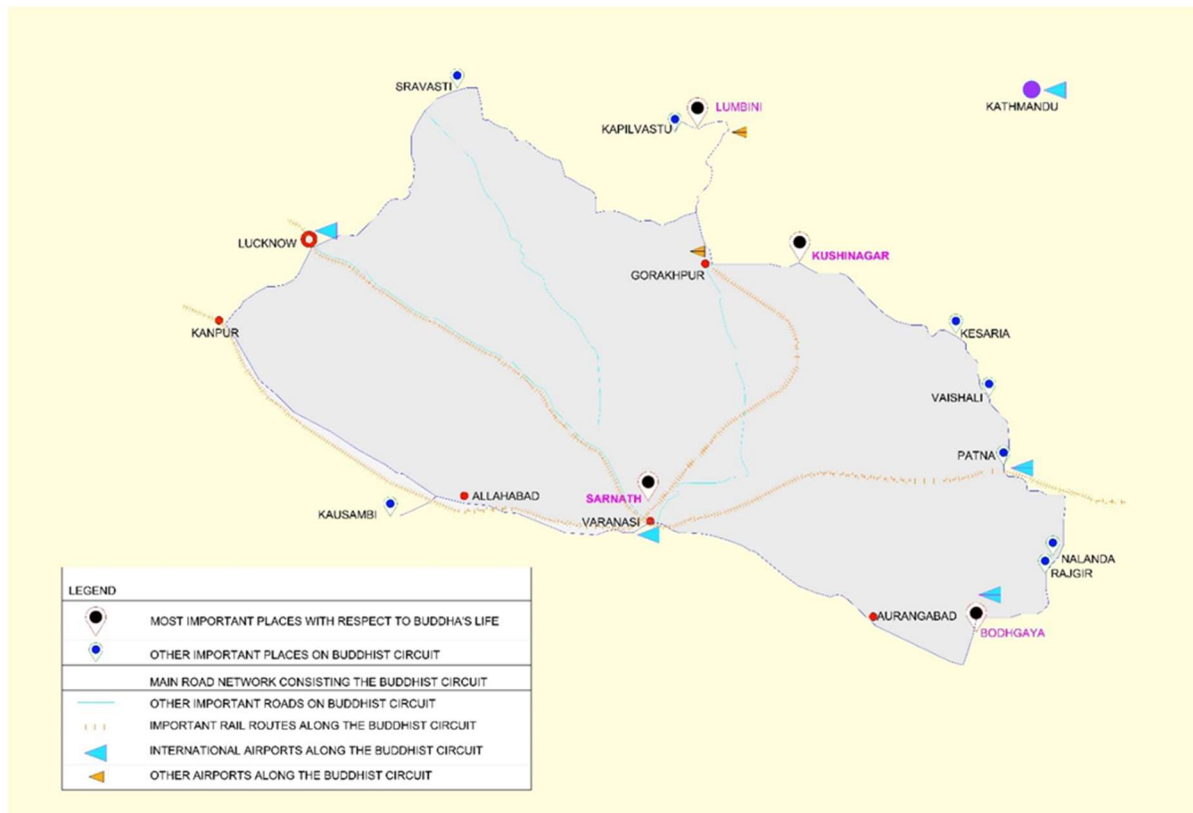
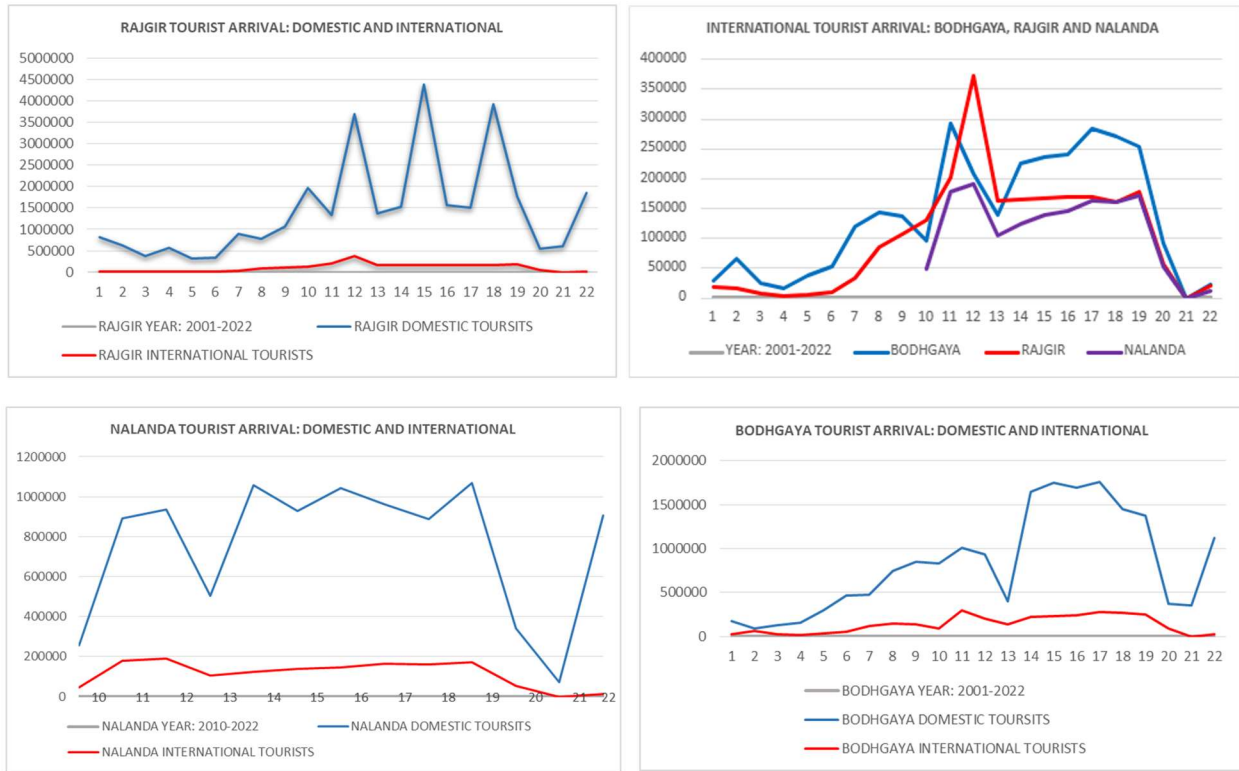


Figure 2: Buddhist Circuit identified by IFC

Source: International Finance Corporation. (2019). Investing in The Buddhist Circuit. In International Finance Corporation. Retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/2bdd4697-6d7f-4f78-bca0-269aa100b25a/Buddhist+Circuit+Tourism+Strategy+Final.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=kC1u ny1>

The study strongly suggests for aggressive public and private investment to tap the immense potential this circuit has. The study found out that three places namely Bodhgaya, Rajgir-Nalanda and Sarnath attracted 81% of the local tourists and 78% of the foreign tourists visiting the significant cities of the Buddhist Circuit (2006 TO 2012) identified by the IFC. And the next growing city in the terms of the number of Indian and foreign tourists is Kushinagar which is remarkably close to the birth place of Buddha, that is Lumbini. The international airports at Gaya (near Bodhgaya, Rajgir/Nalanda) and Varanasi (near Sarnath) have helped significantly in attracting the foreign visitors.

Figure 3: Graphs showing the data of domestic and international tourist arrivals: Bodhgaya-Rajgir-Nalanda



Source: Tourism Department | Government of Bihar. (2023). Retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://state.bihar.gov.in/bihartourism/CitizenHome.html>

The data trend of the tourist arrival, especially the international ones is not very promising and major interventions are needed to attract more international tourists and focus should be on attracting the high paying tourists.

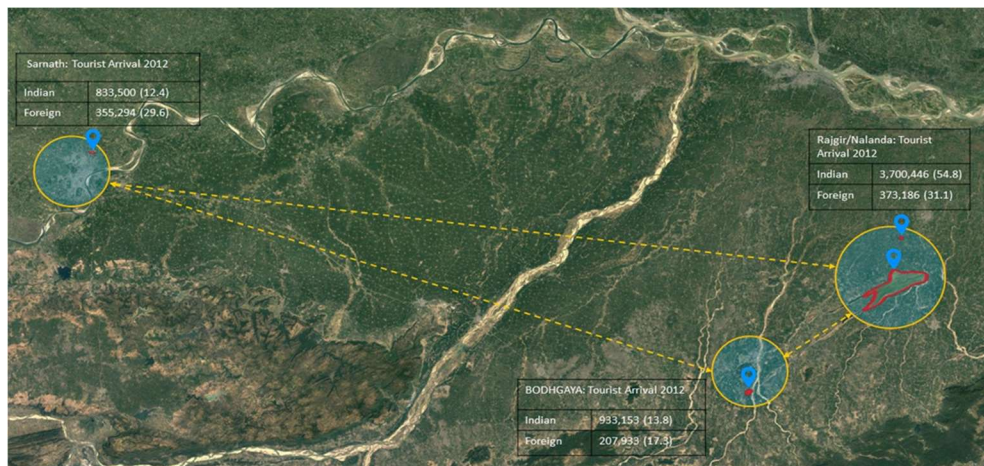


Figure 4: Map showing the triangle on Buddhist Circuit attracting maximum tourists

These three cities attract most of the tourists on the circuit and the Bodhgaya-Rajgir-Nalanda as a Buddhist corridor attracts a huge share of the tourists. Nalanda Ruins and The Mahabodhi Temple Complex, both are UNESCO World Heritage Sites at a distance of just 70 Km. The international airport at Gaya helps Bodhgaya, the airport in Varanasi helps Sarnath and the recently operational Kushinagar Airport would help in attracting more tourists to “Kushinagar and Lumbini (the birth place of Buddha and a UNESCO World Heritage Site).” But these cities have much more potential than what they are doing right now.

FIELD STUDY

A few visits to the site and interaction with the local workforce, the tourists and other important stakeholders has given these observations:

i. Economic impacts of tourism:

The data shows that the growth in the number of international tourists visiting these three important cities is not very promising, as the growth trend is almost flat for the last decade. The arrival of international tourists is crucial for the economic sustainability of these places. Another major problem is the strong seasonality of the tourist arrivals as these places fail badly to attract the international tourists during the off-season months. Most of the foreign tourists are either budget pilgrims or budget explorers and to make the tourism economically sustainable, comfort pilgrims and high-end explorers need to be attracted (the travellers which look for high end facilities and are ready to pay higher for the same) but the basic infrastructure to attract such high paying tourists is mostly missing, like five-star hotels (not even a single four star hotel is present on the core circuit.), luxury segment of transportation, wayside amenities, world class meditation/yoga centres and recreation facilities are completely missing and systematic investment plans are needed to attract this segment of foreign tourists.

The tourism industry of Bodhgaya cannot be termed as economically sustainable, as it is not able to provide good job opportunities to the local work force, (skilled and unskilled both) throughout the year and people are either forced to do some substandard jobs or migrate to other cities in the search of job opportunities. The industry which has grown significantly in the last decade is hotel industry and it gives job opportunities to a decent share of local work force, but the problem arises when the lean season sees negligible international tourists and reduced number of local tourists as well, but unfortunately there is not a single five star on the whole Buddhist Circuit itself, and Bodhgaya is no exception, and such other infrastructure like high end meditation centres, yoga and training centres, tour and travel services, good food joints for the tourists from different parts of the world, and hence mostly the budget travellers and pilgrims are visiting the place and effectively the tourism industry is not becoming economically sustainable. The main reason behind the negligible footfall of international tourists is the climate, but if the infrastructure is developed in a climate responsive way, like they have done it in Dubai or many Middle- East cities, it can definitely be made a year-the-round tourism destination for international tourists. A major problem lies with the fact that there is hardly any aggressive branding initiatives to make this most important place of Buddhists a global tourist destination, at least for the Buddhists. Monasteries and temples

of various countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, Bhutan, Tibet are already existing and some are under construction, but apart from a recently inaugurated Mahabodhi Cultural Center, not very promising infrastructure has come up to attract more high paying tourists. In contrast to the investment in Rajgir (new closed cable car, jungle safari, zoo safari, country's first glass bridge on top of a hill, Ghoda-Katora Taal, and many other such infrastructure developments) Bodhgaya has seen less attention from the investing agencies, though a number of new hotels have come up on the Gaya-Bodhgaya road and around, none of them is start rated and can cater the ultra-rich travellers. Wayside amenities are completely missing, and it makes the journey to Bodhgaya from any major city nearby really painful. There is not a single public toilet from Bodhgaya to Daniyawan via Hilsa-Islampur-Ekangarasarai en-route to state capital Patna. If someone invests in such infrastructure, it will make the journey more comfortable, especially for the young kids and female passengers, but there is hardly any investment coming up, be it from the private sector of the government agencies. There is serious lack of the Branding of Buddhist Circuit, and the importance of Bodhgaya, not a single website gives proper information about the well documented data in different languages and whatever data is available is scattered here and there.

ii. Socio-cultural impacts of tourism:

The development of tourism has created different type of job opportunities for the local work force, be it in hotel industry, travel, tour guides, food carts, street vendors and e-rickshaws have given job opportunities to a crowd which would have not loved to pull the manual rickshaw. The problem lies in the fact that most of the work force is unskilled and hence the wages earned by them is not very promising and it is a challenge to train the local workforce and make them industry ready. For example, there are hardly any tour guides who are well trained and well informed about the history of the place, art and architecture etc., and have the linguistic dexterity to cater the international crowd. The Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar in Collaboration with Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has started Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition at Bodhgaya since 2009, and this institute is training mid and senior level executives in hospitality and catering sector. Apart from the regular degree and diploma courses, this institute is running a skill development program of the ministry of tourism, "Hunar Se Rojgar Tak" (from skill to employment) under which six to eight week course in food and beverage service, food production and "housekeeping utility" is being offered, a six day skill testing and certification course for cooks and waiters is also being offered and capacity building workshops and a two day "Tourism Awareness Programme" is being conducted at Mahabodhi Temple Campus for drivers, cleaners, waiters, helpers, cooks, shopkeepers, handicraft, seller, front office staff, policemen, CISF staff, sanitation workers etc. to make them more aware about the importance of the place, and how to behave with the tourists, especially the foreigner ones. And after conducting a telephonic survey of these people (list with cell-phone numbers available on their website as on 28.04.2023), it was found out that these people were better informed and equipped with skills to cater the tourists more professionally. An important fact is that all the people trained under these workshops are from the local communities. Such efforts are needed to make the local communities more industry ready to harness the positive impact of the tourism

development in a sustainable way. The seasonality of the tourism also impacts the employability of the workforce and initiatives are needed to make this destination a year-the-round tourism destination. In a conversation with the people from hotel industry, an interesting fact was discovered: a good number of people from hotel industry go to Ladakh in summers as it is the lean season in Bodhgaya and Ladakh has open season as well as a good number of Buddhist Population go to the monasteries and other places of Buddhist interest in Ladakh. So, their experience here with Buddhism helps them in Ladakh. But the negative side of this migration is that people are forced to migrate, leaving behind their families, kids and more. An aspect of concern is that if they shift with the family, the schooling of the kids is hampered and there are other such concerns related with this to-and-fro seasonal migration. It may be observed that many tour guides shift to Delhi, Varanasi, Mumbai or any other cities with tourist footfall. Some of the workers migrate to other cities as labourers in the lean season. Some people are forced to do odd jobs during lean season. Moreover, it can be seen that amongst people from other regions of India, devotees from Maharashtra, South India and Bengal come for Pitripakhsha Mela (a mass gathering to do prayers and rituals for their deceased relatives) but they are mostly on budget trips and do not generate much of revenue. Given the historical context of Buddhism related to caste factor in India, it may be observed that a number of people turning towards Buddhism are originally people from lower castes. Buddha Purnima is celebrated every year with great enthusiasm of tourists at Bodh Gaya. Holy food commonly known as prasad is distributed for free at pandals (tents) set for devotees at this day. The prasad is majorly sharbat (cool drink) and chana (gram). It is highly believed by the devotees that there is attainment of salvation and peace at Bodh Gaya. An intriguing factor which may be seen at Bodh Gaya is that there has been a mix of Buddhist-Hindu religion at some of the religious places. In addition, one can find Japanese, Thai, Chinese and more temples which attract devotees from all over the world. Meditation is of ultimate significance at Mahabodhi temple amongst other temples at Bodh Gaya. To walk bare feet at holy places in Bodh Gaya, shoe disposable counters have been run under the state government. Moreover, given security issues and blasts at the famous Maha Bodhi temple in the past, mobiles and other gadgets are also disposed at the entry counters with coupon numbers given to the devotees. In a further conversation with a local at the temple, it was observed that in recent times, young local crowd after being influenced by Buddhism have been turning into monks, some of these monks are accepting Buddhism honestly, but many local youth are sporting the Buddhist monks' robe in the season and aggressively looking for alms from the devotees, tarnishing the real image of Buddhism. It can be said that efforts are being made to make the tourism industry grow in a manner that it accommodates the local communities in a more sustainable way, but the efforts are not sufficient, and a comprehensive approach is needed to mainstream the local communities.

iii. Environmental impacts of tourism:

Like any other tourist city of North India, this city also has the basic problems related to waste management, sanitation, air and water pollution, environmental degradation and though single use plastic has been banned in India since 01st of July 2022 (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2022), but you would find goods being sold in plastic bags of inappropriate

thicknesses and make very frequently, which is being dumped at every nook and corner. Open drains are flowing in many parts of the town, and untreated sewer is being dumped into the Falgu (Niranjana) River directly. The town does not have any scientific waste dumping site and hence waste is mostly being dumped into low lying areas of the town. Another interesting practice was observed that the flowers being offered inside the Mahabodhi Temple is being sold into polystyrene (Thermocol) plates, which is not returned to the devotee, and it is being collected and dumped to the Falgu River along with the plate. It is polluting the river at an alarming rate.

Figure 5: Flowers being sold in polystyrene plates



Figure 6: Mass tourism witnessed on Buddha Jayanti Celebrations, 2567



There are examples of NGO's or start-ups using these offering to repackage and sale it for some revenue generation as well. Such initiatives are rarely seen here. The negative impacts of mass-tourism was also visible on the occasion of 2567th Buddha Jayanti Celebration from 4th to 6th of May, 2023 as large groups of Buddhists form Maharashtra had come to witness the occasion, Most of them were from lower economic strata and were travelling in groups of 40-50, staying in

Dharamshalas or budget hotels arranged by their travel organisation. And such gatherings were causing different types of pollutions.

A key positive observation was noted that around 1.5 kilometre of the access road to the Mahabodhi Temple Complex has been restricted for private vehicles and they have to park their vehicle at the designated parking lot and then take an e-rickshaw or would have to walk to the temple complex. The map below shows the path recorded using the health and fitness app STRAVA (version 304.0.0) on 29-04-2023. And a very controlled vehicular movement has been allowed around the temple complex with various traffic police check-posts which is helping in reducing the pollution levels around the complex.

Figure 7: Non-motorised approach road to temple complex-path recorded using STRAVA



The non-motorisation of the 1.5 Km long approach road has helped in reducing air pollution, noise pollution, and nuisance and road accidents but on the other side it has affected the business of the hotels with parking facilities on the stretch, as told by the staff of a few hotels in this stretch.



Figure 8: Bodhgaya Administrative Boundary and Controlled Vehicular Movement Zone

iv. Some government initiatives:

The major interventions has been carried out currently are the operationalization of Regional Connectivity Scheme UDAN linking “Buddhist destinations, the expansion of Gaya Railway Station, the construction of national and state highways connecting Buddhist destinations, the expansion of Bodhgaya underneath the Iconic Sites and Swadesh Darshan schemes, the advancement of museums and heritage centres at Buddhist destinations, and the digitization of Buddhist sites.” To promote Buddhist places and legacy in India, interventions are planned under public awareness, communication, as well as outreach vertical. These include the establishment of a virtual exhibition on shared “Buddhist heritage just at National Museum and an annual calendar of activities., a Buddhist media campaign in important source markets, a Buddhist conclave, etc.” (Ministry of tourism 2021).

DISCUSSION

Human social life would be incomplete without tourism, which is a major driver of human migration in history. Tourist has the potential to have both positive and negative effects on the host communities and environments it visits. Sustainable tourism doesn't really degrade or change the area over an endless length of time (human and physical) environment in such a way that it impedes the growth or well-being of other activities in the area (community or environment).

Taking a "sustainable" approach is necessary because the tourism industry is so vulnerable to change, has so many different sectors, and is also dependent on the quality of the host environment and communities. Tourism that degrades the quality of the host communities and nations puts their future at risk. Even though tourists have been traveling since the dawn of time, tourism today is primarily driven by the pursuit of fulfilment and recreation at the expense of the environment, resulting in the exploitation of previously untouched regions.

Toxic pollution and encroachment on natural habitats, as well as negative effects on local populations, can result from the over-exploitation of tourist destinations. As a result of this scenario, proper management of natural resources is necessary to ensure that present and future generations can enjoy nature's beauty, which in turn will increase tourist flows and revenues.

A commitment to Sustainable Tourism must be signed by tour operators certified by the Ministry of Tourism to fully implement Sustainable Tourism practices in line with the finest standards for environmental and heritage protection. Numerous state governments have shown admirable support for sustainable and responsible forms of tourism, including homestays, agro-tourism, adventure tourism, and rural tourism. Voluntary actions have also been taken by industry to become more sustainable, particularly in terms of energy use, material procurement, and the use of environmentally friendly practices.

Governments, tourist destinations, and the tourism industry all face similar challenges when it comes to promoting sustainable tourism and measuring their progress in implementing green policies. Governing bodies can benefit from tourist policies that address both economic, social, and environmental issues, and which are established with knowledge of both the potential for harm and profit. To mainstream sustainability in the Indian tourism sector, a national strategy and road

map for sustainable tourism with a focus on adventure and ecotourism have been established. Adventure and ecotourism can also help people realise their full potential as a medium for tourism, conservation, and employment.

The secondary data and the expert survey, the interviews of the tourists and the workforce there, and government officials, tour guides, hotel staff, tourists, and various NGOs in Bodhgaya suggests that Sustainable Tourism in a developing country like India becomes extraordinarily complex due to the lack of basic infrastructure, lack of funds, lack of knowledge and expertise, lack of awareness in the common masses and the lack of political will-power etc.

CONCLUSION

Now a significant global socioeconomic activity, tourism affects society and culture in a variety of ways, both positively and negatively, including the economics, ecology, and environment. Sustainable tourism is an effort to grow the industry in a way that benefits the environment, culture, economy, local culture, locals, and everything else directly or indirectly connected to tourism. The perception and happiness of the numerous stakeholders who are both participating in the process overall, directly and indirectly of tourism at any place have a significant impact on the tourism and hospitality business. To ensure the growth and advancement of sustainable tourism, stakeholders' perspectives are constantly considered regarding expectations and contrasted with their satisfaction. Sustainability encompasses all components necessary for a full travel experience.

The potential for the tourism sector to further sustainable development objectives is enormous. The goal of sustainable tourism would be to strike a balance between the protection of the environment, the preservation of maintaining cultural integrity, advancing social justice, and promoting economic gains, while also meeting a need of the locals in terms of enhanced living standards in both emerging and developed nations. Numerous studies have been undertaken on various facets of sustainability, including its effects on culture, society, and the environment, as well as its perceived economic advantages (Choi and Murray 2010). Additionally, studies have shown that stakeholders' levels of satisfaction are crucial for the growth of environmentally friendly tourism everywhere (Gursoy et al. 2002). The use of sustainable tourism practises is impacted by a wide range of variables, including social, cultural, and economic concerns at each stage of the tourist sector (Gupta et al., 2021). And achieving sustainable tourism in developing country like India become extremely complicated due to problems at multiple levels. The policies always look very promising on paper, but it rarely gets implemented properly on ground.

Bodhgaya has an exceptionally long way to go before it witnesses a tourism development which is smartly sustainable and has a fine balance between the positives and negatives of tourism development. Several factors are stopping this site from becoming a “round the year” tourist destination (especially religious tourism for Buddhists) and to attract high paying tourists to make the tourism more sustainable with less numbers of tourists paying more and helping in negating the challenges created by mass-tourism.

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