

A Study of Religious Tourism as a tool for Sustainability: The Case of Maharashtra

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ABSTRACT

The sustainable development of tourism is still a huge challenge. In this paper, we regard Maharashtra religious tourism as a special form of tourism that can enrich Maharashtra tourism products while providing a way to alleviate the adverse effects of mass tourism and support sustainability. Although evidence is provided in the literature about the role of religious tourism as an alternative form of tourism, no formal method has been incorporated into this role. The study investigated the determinants and prospects of religious tourism in Maharashtra and how it is supported by local residents' understanding of the concept and prospects of religious tourism and its links to local traditions and culture. This is the first step in making relevant bodies and institutions aware of the integration of religious tourism into their overall strategic plan for sustainable tourism development. It also introduces future research directions.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development of tourism is one of the most important challenges faced by national planners, such as public and private tourism organizations and institutions, in today's competitive environment (Du Cros, H. and McKercher, B. 2015). Most strategic plans reflect the pursuit of sustainable development. (Grifes, 2000).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as a tourism industry that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is not a product, but a spirit that supports all tourism activities and meets the needs of tourists and host regions. (UNWTO, 2005). In addition, maintaining the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any adverse effects on the natural, historical, cultural or social environment remains the focus of sustainable tourism development (Brutland, 1987).

Special forms of tourism provide a challenge for tourism destinations, rationalize their plans, reduce the negative impact of mass tourism, and attract quality tourists.

In this article, we consider Maharashtra religious tourism as a special form of tourism that enriches Maharashtra tourism products while providing alternatives that mitigate the adverse effects of mass tourism. Pilgrimage and religious tourism are often considered to be the oldest forms of non-economic tourism and one of the least adequate areas of tourism research (Vukonic, 1998).

The increase in spiritually motivated travel in the modern era coincided with the growth of tourism in all times, especially after the 19th century, the development of tourism was generally based on people's leisure time and their movement to various places within the country or other countries. This study shows that residents of Maharashtra have a strong understanding of the concept and prospects of religious tourism and their support and connections to local traditions and culture.

Today, pilgrimages are considered "popular as they have been in the past and have experienced global market recovery in the past few decades" (Digance, 2003). This development has been observed in cultural and religious traditions (Reader, 2007). In addition, the widespread use of pilgrimages in the media has led travelers to tend to classify some of their travels as "pilgrimages", which helps to blur the line between "religion" and "secular" or "traditional" and "alternative" pilgrimages (Margry, 2008).

Although pilgrimage seems to be a prototypical medieval phenomenon from a European-Christian perspective, many of Europe's largest pilgrimage sites are truly modern developments. Far from being relics of pre-modern religious history, they are important, but too often overlooked elements of modern religion. Modern means of transportation and other factors are relevant to the development of modern tourism (Stausberg, 2011).

2. Current Situation of Cypriot tourism

One of the most serious problems facing the Maharashtra tourism industry is seasonality. The congestion of foreign tourists during the summer season not only means that the production capacity of tourism enterprises is low in one year, but also means that efforts to further develop the tourism industry in Maharashtra are not effective. Therefore, it is very necessary to extend this period.

Today's global trends are based on the efforts of sustainable tourism development, which is now seen as human and natural environmentally friendly (William, 2005). Forms of tourism, such as agricultural tourism, special tourism, cultural tourism, conference tourism, religion, and urban tourism, are the alternative forms of tourism that should prevail, making tourism sustainable and solving seasonal problems.

Alternative tourism is part of a specific form of tourism characterized by the existence of special incentives for demand and the development of specific infrastructure (supply). Through alternative tourism, people are looking for a different

holiday model that protects religious and cultural heritage, local culture and traditions, protect the natural and man-made environment and avoids the use of organized mass tourism (Tsartas, 1996). Good cultural practices and the emergence of cultural heritage as an added value to tourism have now become the target of many European initiatives, including Maharashtra through various tourism development companies and the promotion of Maharashtra as a tourist destination.

3. Development of religious and pilgrimage Tourism

Religious tourism can be described as the human movement for the search of the sanctuary or the divine, due to important psychological and spiritual individual needs of pilgrims regardless of race, ethnicity or religion, which can cause multiple economic, cultural and social consequences in certain places of pilgrimage or religious destination (Moir, 2009).

Some religious resources, such as churches, monasteries, icons, sacred objects, attract pilgrims to certain destinations because they meet their internal incentives, either participating in religious tours and ceremonies or fulfilling a person's vows. In some cases, the simple incentive is the visitor's devoted mood.

At the international level, religious tourism is well developed. Travel organizers work with international public agencies, airlines and the tourism sector to contribute to the strategic development of religious and pilgrimage tourism.

Many people go to a variety of holy sites not only for religious or spiritual purposes, but also have sacred experiences in the traditional sense, and because they are marked and sold as heritage or cultural attractions (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Based on this, it can be concluded that religious tourism refers not only to tourism forms with strong or single-minded pilgrimage motives, but also to non-pilgrimage tourism activities, such as sightseeing and farming in religious places. (Mu et al., 2007).

Maharashtra can make use of religious tourism and other forms of tourism. The development of tourism in Maharashtra should be promoted through the establishment of integrated products. To this end, the Maharashtra Tourism Organization (CTO) is required to work with the Maharashtra Church and tourism partners in the private and public sectors to provide alternative activities and tourism to meet the needs and aspirations of religious visitors. (Rodosthenous, 2012).

For example, traveling to Maharashtra can combine alternative forms of tourism such as religion and pilgrimage, ecotourism with various paths and nature trails, cultural tourism, and the "sun-sea" model. This is easy to achieve due to the short distance within the island, soil morphology, and good weather conditions.

4. Recent developments and prospects of religious and pilgrimage tourism

"International travel continues to grow strongly, consolidating tourism as a major driver of economic

development. As the world's third largest export sector, tourism is vital to job creation and the prosperity of communities around the world," said Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization. Polikashvili said. "However, as we continue to evolve, we must work closely together to ensure that this growth benefits every member of every host community and is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals".

This social phenomenon of religion and pilgrimage can also be found in many other countries, such as Saudi Arabia. During the Hajj, all Muslim pilgrims must do at least a journey to Mecca in their lifetime, representing \$16.5 billion, or about 3% of the Saudi GDP; the one of KumbhaMela in India, held every two years in India for about two months, with about 75 million people. The pilgrims in Lourdes, France, reach 6 million a year, while the pilgrims in Tibet and Santiago de Compostela in Spain are also millions and will not stop increasing (Yunis, 2006). There are many other places of worship around the world, including Mount Athos, Tinos, Corfu, and Patmos in Greece, the Holy land in Israel, Kykkos, Stavrovouni, Saint Lazarus in Maharashtra, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey, having millions of pilgrims every year, while others receive different numbers. According to experts, pilgrimage is no longer the only driving force for religious tourism. In spiritual individuals, the desire to experience and learn during travel are increasing. They are also seeking higher quality travel experiences in various sub-sectors of special interest tourism to drive industry growth. Hosting countries need to meet these requirements. Therefore, religious tourism, especially religious tourism in the Middle East, has become one of the most flexible and profitable commercial markets in the tourism industry, and every country in the region should hope to gain a larger share. Therefore, the prospects for Maharashtra are expected to be very important and optimistic, as the number of international visitors to Maharashtra reached a record of 3.6 million in 2017, an increase of 14%. Optimistic prospects are reinforced by the relevant data of the World Tourism Organization that suggest annual revenue of 18 billion Euros for religious and pilgrimage tourism. In addition, about 400 million people travel to religious sites each year, and in the global market, nearly 3 billion people seem to have religious and pilgrimage references. At the same time, religious and pilgrimage tourism is the only "robust" type of tourism, especially during the difficult times of the economic crisis, where travel agencies are eager to add more information to religious and pilgrimage material advertisements. (UNWTO, 2016).

The Christian worship and traditional monuments of Maharashtra are an integral part of the national heritage and a valuable tourist attraction on the island. Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches with important iconography, mosaics, murals, and rare icons, chapels and shrines, especially the UNESCO-protected monasteries of the Troodos region (CTO, 2008), revealing lasting adherence to the close and long-term relationship between tradition and art and religious worship.

5. Growth & Distribution of Tourism Employment in Ratnagiri district

The proportion of tourism related employment in East Ratnagiri District is comparatively less than west region.

Beaches and major Religious sources are mainly located to the western part of the district; tourists preferentially give visit to this region for their stay. Western side Beach places like Kelshi, Murud, Guhagar and Tavsar, Ganpatipule, Ratnagiri as well as religious places like Ganpatipule, Pawas, Guhagar, Anjarle, and Hedvi, Velneshwar etc. places have succeeded to attract 70% tourists and have offered high share of employment in comparison to Eastern region of the district.

6. Growth and Factor wise Contribution of Tourism in Ratnagiri district:

An assessment of contribution of tourism is quite essential to study impact of tourism in Ratnagiri district. Tourism development has direct-indirectly contributed for the growth of various factors in Ratnagiri district. Growth of these factors is useful to judge growth of tourism in Ratnagiri district. Table No.1 reflects factorial contribution of tourism in between 2007 to 2013. Total numbers of tourist arrivals has increased in Ratnagiri district. Such growth was by 62.03% at the end of 2013 in respect to 2007. Tourism of Ratnagiri district is mainly depended upon domestic tourist. Proportion FTA was negligible during study period. MTDC has its own tourist accommodation in Ratnagiri district mainly at Ganpatipule&Hedvi. This activity has stood profitable for MTDC in Ratnagiri district. MTDC has achieved year wise growth in its

income. At the end of 2013 such income was increased by 63.73% in comparison to 2007. MTDC has improved its intake capacity by constructing additional rooms at Ganpatipule&Hedvi due to increasing tourist flow. In the year 2007 MTDC had total 267 rooms in Ratnagiri district. MTDC has extended its capacity and has acquired additional land at Ganpatipule. At the end of 2013 MTDC had 311 rooms. During this period numbers of private lodges & their intake capacity have also increased. At the end of 2013 there were 153 licensed private lodges with 2344 rooms in Ratnagiri district; these numbers are excluding dharmashalas, trust operated dormitories, government guest houses & unregistered domestic stay facilities. Official data about total numbers of hotels and restaurants in Ratnagiri district is not available. Data is available about only those who have obtained & renewed their licenses. Total numbers of unregistered hotels & restaurants have also increased. These hotels are established mainly at tourist destinations and or close to main roads; some of these are seasonal & temporary. Total numbers of travel agents have also increased from 13 to 37. MTDC has issued separate license & necessary support to tour operators & travel agents. Other tour operators and agents who are working privately have excluded from this list due to non-availability of appropriate data.

Table No.1 Year-wise Growth of Tourism Industry & its contribution in Ratnagiri District

Sr. No.	Tourism Related Factors (Contribution of Tourism)	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
1.	Nos. of Tourists Arrivals (Domestic/Foreign)	5,17,358/ 413	5,90,761/ 632	7,89,131/ 279	8,01,023/ 922	8,13,262/ 1312	8,37,509/ 1,167
2.	% - Growth in MTDC – Income Accommodations	17.20%	25.44%	39.82%	47%	54.21%	63.73%
3.	Nos. of Lodges & Rooms (MTDC/ Private)	2+267/ 124+ 1448	2+267/ 131+ 1650	2+299/ 137+1987	2+299/ 145+2192	2+311/ 147+ 2217	2+311/ 153+2344
4.	Hotels & Restaurants (Licensed)	417	439	532	547	629	643
5.	Nos. of Travel Agents	13	15	21	26	30	37
6.	Increased in Nos. of Passenger Vehicles	119167	139007	149237	167449	186345	199767-P
7.	Total Length of Constructed Road	7206Kms.	7213Kms	7457Kms.	7480Kms.	7551Kms.	7640kms.
8.	MSRTC Income (Lakh)	Rs. 11892	Rs.13479	Rs. 14142	Rs.15815	Rs. 18108	Rs.20113
9.	Share of Trade, Tourism & Hotels in GDP	16.63%	13.94%	14.32%	14.81%	15.17%	16.80%
10.	Stamp Duty & Registration Fees (In Lakh)	2109/-	3117/-	3656/-	4511/-	5514/-	6813/-
11.	Per Capita Income	43,387/-	47196/-	51964/-	61092/-	66921/-	80086/-
12.	Total Dist. Income (Net- In Lakh)	745503	864344	1059138	1252025	1336218	1553442-P
13.	Exp. Under District Plan for Tourism Dev.	Rs.43.95/- Lakh	234.87 Lakh	401.44 Lakh	413.22 Lakh	450 Lakh	517 Lakh
14.	Total Nos. of CBOs.	927	1031	1103	1197	1300	1321

MSRTC is suffering by huge loss at state level; while tourism in Ratnagiri has contributed to boost the MSRTC in Ratnagiri district in some proportionate. Marleshwar fair, Ganga festival of Rajapur, temple of Ganpatipule as well as Ganesh & Holi (Shimga) festivals are important source of income for

MSRTC in Ratnagiri district. Tourism has stood as source of revenue in Ratnagiri district. Yet, it is being not treated as separate income head in district revenue. But, it's collective share in the form of trade, transport, hotels & restaurant have contributed for increase in district revenue. At the end of 2007

share of this industry was 16.80% in district revenue excluding transport & communication services. Tourism has developed as source of income for most of people in Ratnagiri district. It has resulted in growth of per capita income in Ratnagiri district. On the eve of industrial, agricultural setback and decreased fish productivity; per capita income of Ratnagiri district has increased up to Rs. 72213/- at the end of 2013. Tourism industry is one important contributor for such growth. Tourism value of Ratnagiri district is increasing day by day; it has resulted through change in investment trend. Land & properties in Ratnagiri district at various tourist destinations has developed as source of investment i.e. real estate investments. Such land & property dealings have contributed to grow share of stamp duty & registration fees in district revenue. This share increased by 32.50% at the end of 2014 in comparison to 2007. District planning committee has also recognized tourism importance of Ratnagiri district & provided year wise separate grants for the infrastructure development at various tourist destinations in the district.. This provision was Rs. 43.95 lakh in 2007 and has increased up to Rs. 517 lakh at the end of 2013. This was an additional provision excluding special Konkan package grant provided by State Government for regional tourism development in Ratnagiri district. Local people of Ratnagiri district have also become aware towards tourism development in their region. They have formed various community based organisations (CBO) and shown their active involvement in tourism promotion, entrepreneurship development and environmental conservations. During the study period total 65 CBO's were observed as directly associated with tourism industry in Ratnagiri district ; while other CBO's were observed as indirectly associated with tourism promotion & development in the district. Like Women's SHGs and NGOs those are working for environment conservations and cultural promotions. In short tourism is developing as economic engine to boost district revenue through direct and induced impact. It provides jobs and business opportunities to producers and service providers.

7. Improvement for religious tourism development

Regarding the issues that need to be improved in order to further develop religious tourism, the answers are given focus on improving the role of the mass media, thereby facilitating access to monasteries and sanctuaries, fostering interest and respecting materials and the heritage of the sacred destination. In addition, it is also recommended to train tourism partners to promote cultural heritage, especially religious sites, at home and abroad as well as at tourist fairs.

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The writing and translation of the holy books on pilgrimage will contribute to the development of religious tourism. Others believe that visibility, correct and effective information and specialized programs will help to transcend the narrow scope of dogmatism, but provide information on the cultural richness of religious heritage based on knowledge and spiritual advancement. Therefore, other cultural and religious visitors can also be interested in the cooperation and synergy between the local church and other churches and religious destinations, creating "religious streets" and religious activities, further developing European plans, developing tourism and cultural cross-border cooperation.

8. Conclusion

Tourism has grown up as worldwide industry. Its growth & development has proved that industry has huge potential as an economic contributor in world and regional economies. The countries which are developing and under developed may boost their economies by exploring their tourists' resources as major source of foreign exchange earnings including employment source for local people. Share of Asian countries in world tourism revenue need to grow as compare to percentage of their population. India's is position in FEE from tourism is also not satisfactory as compare to availability of tourism resources. FTA scenario in Maharashtra is comparatively good on the basis of statistical records in respect to other states; but practically most of these tourists visit Maharashtra for landing purpose only during their transit. The position of State of Maharashtra was at 4th to 5th stage in total number of domestic tourist arrivals in between 2005-10; no major changes have observed in this scenario till to 2013. Konkan has emerged as new tourist zones due to its religious, natural & cultural resources. Socio- 108 economic profile of various tourist destinations of Konkan and especially in Ratnagiri district has proved the role of tourism in regional development. It has succeeded in some proportionate to stop migration of working population towards Mumbai, Pune and some other part of the country. Government of Maharashtra has also given attention to develop infrastructure in the district to boost tourism in the region. Proportion FTA in Ratnagiri district is not satisfactory at present need based special tourism resources and tourism packages need to be channelize in the region to attract foreign tourist in sufficient numbers. Further study is required to explore the true benefits of tourism developments for the betterment of main stakeholders.

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