

Spiritual Tourism: An Indian Context

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Abstract—India is a country with rich heritage and religious tradition. Every year millions of people travel to pilgrimage destinations in India. The number goes up especially during religious months likewise, makkar sankranti, navratra, new year, diwali etc. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) reports that foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) increased by 7.7 per cent in April 2024 to 6,50,748 from 6,03,985 in April 2023. India rose from 54th place in 2021 to 39th place out of 119 countries in the World Economic Forum’s Travel and Tourism Index report 2024. In India, people frequently travel on spiritual journey in order to connect with a god or fulfil a vow. The desire to discover more about a specific religion or culture, or the need to feel refreshed and at peace, can also serve as driving forces behind spiritual tourism. The paper aims to evaluate the current state of spiritual tourism in India. It also examines the strengths and weakness.

Keywords- spiritual, quotient, life, tourism, quality.

I. INTRODUCTION

A higher quality of life and healthy behavior are encouraged by spiritual intelligence. It comes from a latin word “Spirare” which means to breathe. It is a fundamental feature of human nature and is cited by many thinkers as the origin of all beliefs, morals, emotions and actions. King (2008) defines SQ as, “a set of mental capacities which contribute to the awareness, integration and adaptive application of the nonmaterial and transcendent aspects of one’s existence, leading to such outcomes as deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent and mastery of spiritual states.” The SQ model consists of four components:

1. Critical Existential Thinking (CET) - The ability to critically consider meaning, purpose, and other existential or metaphysical concerns (such as reality, the universe, space, time, and death). Additionally, the ability to consider non-existent problems from an existential standpoint; for example, moral problem solving, which is the capacity to apply critical thinking to ethical conundrums while being conscious of one's own moral convictions and spiritual views.
2. Personal Meaning Production (PMP) - The ability to infer personal meaning and purpose from all of one's physical and mental experiences, including the ability to develop and achieve a life purpose, is known as personal meaning production, or PMP. It involves a feeling of a greater meaning, or purpose, connected to an individual's perception of the holy or divine.
3. Transcendental Awareness (TA) - the ability to recognize transcendent aspects of the physical world (e.g., non-materialism, interconnectivity), of others, and of oneself (e.g., a transcendent self) while in a regular, waking state of consciousness.
4. Conscious State Expansion (CSE) – It describes the ability to freely access the spiritual areas of consciousness, ones or pure consciousness) which can be achieved by intentional practice likewise, meditation, prayers, deep breathing.

II. SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Spiritual tourism is also known by other names, likewise, faith tourism, sacred tourism and religious tourism. It has existed in India since the beginning of times. It includes activities, like, visiting temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras, monasteries, retreat centers and ashrams.

Importance of Spiritual tourism

1. To promote tourism – within India and foreign
2. To promote harmony and spirituality
3. To promote culture and history of the country
4. To promote young generations, connect with pilgrim sites
5. To promote employment opportunities

Norman (2012) has created five categories of Spiritual Tourism.

1. SPIRITUAL TOURISM AS HEALING

It includes elements related to physical health and wellness travel. This could include attractions that offer psychological treatment as well as other kinds like ashrams and yoga retreats.

2. SPIRITUAL TOURISM AS EXPERIMENT

Under this category, travellers look for alternatives when they sense the need for them. Backpacking spiritual tourists who visit places with offerings like yoga, meditation, and ashram experiences are the examples given.

3. SPIRITUAL TOURISM AS QUEST

Under this category, the main element is the act of learning and exploration. Examples of attractions in this category include looking for information about religious customs (such as Hindu religious ceremonies performed at India's "Kumbh Mela" celebration and unique aspects of various cultures).

4. SPIRITUAL TOURISM AS RETREAT

Under this category, the traveller tries to escape from daily life and looks for a religious experience or a ritual rejuvenation under the heading of "Spiritual Tourism as Retreat." These travellers may be drawn to ecotourism destinations, health spas, and meditation retreats.

5. SPIRITUAL TOURISM AS COLLECTIVE

The final category, "Spiritual Tourism as Collective," refers to the experience of the traveller as a member of a collective; they wish to attend because so many other people are. The attractions in this category may consist of a number of spiritually well-known aspects.

With its steady rise over the years, tourism has become an essential component of human life and plays a crucial role in economic progress of our country. Faith, sacred, or religious tourism are other names for spiritual tourism. It can be further categorized into pilgrimage, meditation, wellness & yoga. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) reports that foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) increased by 7.7 per cent in April 2024 to 6,50,748 from 6,03,985 in April 2023. Between January and April of 2024, there were 34,71,883 FTAs, up 10.8 per cent from 31,33,751 during the same period in 2023. 83 per cent of GEN Z value cultural, immersive and distinctive experiences and prefer travel options, according to a booking.com survey. They design the journey using AI and robotic services. Moreover, data shows that 61 per cent of respondents travelled with their families and 65 per cent traveled alone in the previous year. 77 per cent cited social media posts from friends and family as inspiration to travel. The millennial generation spent \$ 6,031 on travel in 2024, followed by GEN Z (\$ 2,622), GEN X (\$ 3,059) and Boomers (\$ 2,600).

The top places for Spiritual tourism are:

Varanasi	Dharamshala
Haridwar	Kasar Devi
Rishikesh	Vrindavan
Amritsar	Bodh Gaya
Pushkar	Tiruvannamalai
Hampi	Ajmer

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Halim et al (2021) developed a conceptual model of spiritual tourism with seven themes, namely, meaning/purpose of life, consciousness, spiritual resources, transcendence, self-determination, reflection - soul purification and spiritual coping with obstacles. The purpose of the model was to serve as a systematic pathway to future researchers. It was found that tourism offers opportunities among humans to gain spiritual development through religious and non-religious activities.

Suhan and Aprillia (2023) conducted a study to investigate and evaluate the impact of spiritual marketing on customer loyalty of Wardah brand in Indonesia. Using probability of t-statistic and variance based structural equation model, it was found that spiritual marketing is necessary to develop devoted customer.

Kolade et al (2023) examined the function of spiritual capital in a volatile sub-Saharan African setting where religion is deeply ingrained in the culture and businesses are battling institutional instability and macroeconomic shocks that have been made worse by the COVID-19 outbreak. The study is based on a survey of 622 businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. It was found that the influence of social capital on entrepreneurial resilience is substantially mediated by spiritual capital, which aids business owners in navigating challenging and unstable situations. The study emphasized the importance of social capital as a unique resource likewise other intangible resource.

Baykal (2024) explained Theory U which is a strategy to social change that is relational, transformative, learning-driven and progress-directed. Special talents are required for success on the U-journey which includes overcoming spiritual obstacles, meditating, developing sensing, staying in flow, and conceiving. According to Theory-U, solutions to complicated problems must originate from sources other than the obsolete paradigms that gave rise to tricky problems. This paper aims to show how people who are exposed to spirituality in the workplace might better utilize their spiritual intelligence which helps people achieve the kind of awareness and engagement which is important for collective consciousness.

Samarathunga et al (2024) highlighted the potential of spiritual tourism as a type of health tourism using Mandala Health model in Sri Lanka. The model included interviews with spiritual tourists and providers. It was found that spiritual tourism has a great potential in Sri Lanka as it reveals that spiritual tourism is influenced by religious motivations, cultural and environmental elements, and individual beliefs, and that Sri Lanka, with its abundance of natural and cultural resources, is well-positioned to see a rise in spiritual tourism. It was found that a connection between consumerism and spiritual reliability posed difficulties for Sri Lanka's growth in sustainable spiritual tourism.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To define and explore the scope of spiritual tourism in India.
2. To analyze the strengths and weakness of spiritual tourism in India

IV. DISCUSSION

Government of India Initiatives:

1. PRASHAD SCHEME

Under the Ministry of Tourism, the Indian government launched the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) program in 2014–15. It seeks to improve the tourist experience in pilgrimage sites across India by their identification and development. Its main goal is to provide a holistic religious tourist experience by integrating these locations in a structured, sustainable, and prioritized way. The program places a strong emphasis on the comprehensive development of particular pilgrimage locations through government initiatives and cooperation with other stakeholders, acknowledging the critical role that pilgrimage tourism plays in promoting the growth of domestic tourism. The program's ultimate goal is to develop and encourage religious travel in India. 29 new sites were identified for tourism infrastructure development out of which 12 have been inaugurated. Rs. 1,621.14 crore has been sanctioned out of which 62.7 per cent has been disbursed.

2. SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

It was introduced in 2014-15 by the Ministry of Tourism. Financial support was provided to the State governments, union territory administrations, and central agencies to build tourism infrastructure at different locations. The availability of funds, the filing of appropriate, thorough project reports, compliance with scheme standards, and the appropriate use of previously released funds were all conditions that had to be met before this aid could be provided. In total 76 projects were approved under designated thematic circuits in 31 states and union territories between 2014–15 and 2018–19. Funding for these initiatives totaled US\$639.2 million (Rs. 5,292.57 crores). Swadesh Darshan 2.0 focused on integrated tourism destination development which targets 57 destinations across 32 states and UT. Twenty-nine projects have been sanctioned total cost of Rs. 644 crores.

3. INCREDIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN

The Ministry of Tourism launched it in 2002 with the goal of promoting and developing an image of India that reflected its history, variety, and spirituality. Since the launch of this campaign, the number of foreign tourists has increased by 16 per cent in the following year. In 2017, Incredible India 2.0 was launched to promote tourism related products including wellness, yoga, wildlife, food and luxury. In particular, it emphasized on content production and promotion. This year, the emphasis is on the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

4. E-VISA

It is granted to a foreign visitor who is visiting India with objective of travelling, recreation, medical treatment, business purpose or meeting family or relatives or attending a short-term yoga program.

5. MICE TOURISM

MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions). The main objective is to create a networking platform for the corporate, industry, government, and academic communities and facilitating meaningful talks. It will help in generating employment, business opportunities, training and skill upgradation. 'Meet in India', 'Heal in India' and 'India says I do' are some of the campaigns of MICE.

6. PILGRIMAGE PACKAGE BY IRCTC (INDIAN RAILWAYS AND CATERING AND TOURISM CORPORATION)

Special devotional tour packages are available on irctc website covering the whole India to meet the choices of devotees. Some packages are especially available during festive seasons, likewise, makar Sankranti, Navratri. Some examples are – Shri Ramayan Yatra, Kumbh special, Dwarkadish Jyotirling Yatra, Baidyanath Ganga Yatra and Bharta Darshan Special South India tour.

7. EFFORTS BY STATE GOVERNMENT

IV.I. PUNJAB MUKHYAMANTRI TIRATH YATRA SCHEME

The scheme will benefit senior citizens of Punjab who can't go on pilgrimage due to financial constraints. Under this scheme, the govt. will cover cost of lodging, meals and transportation. Other states have also launched such schemes and programs to boost spiritual tourism.

IV.II. UTTAR PRADESH

Kashi Vishwanath Dham and Ayodhya Dham are a prominent tourist site in UP. Kumbh mela and Varanasi are all time favorite destinations in UP. This year the government also launched six major spiritual circuits which will be completed by the year 2027.

List of projects under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, organized by circuit from FY14–15 until

January 21, 2024, is as follows:

S. NO.	NAME OF THE PROJECT	NO. OF PROJECTS	AMOUNT SANCTIONED (IN Rs. Crores)
1	Buddhist Circuit	5	319.01
2	Coastal circuit	10	631.39
3	Desert Circuit	1	50.01
4	Eco Circuit	6	415.44
5	Heritage Circuit	10	742.85
6	Himalayan Circuit	7	587.92
7	Krishna Circuit	2	153.19
8	North-East circuit	10	816.13
9	Ramayan Circuit	2	196.66
10	Rural Circuit	2	101.62
11	Spiritual Circuit	13	672.61
12	Tirthankar Circuit	1	33.96
13	Tribal Circuit	4	371.47
14	Wildlife Circuit	2	186.78

15	Wayside	1	15.07
	TOTAL	76	5,294.11

(SOURCE: PIB)

IV.III. STRENGTHS

1. PROMOTING RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Such destinations attract tourist from various religions and it involves exploring and sharing cultures and beliefs. Tourists stay together and share friendships during this journey.

2. PRESERVE RELIGIOUS SITES

These locations garner international recognition, which boosts public and governmental support. Additionally, UNESCO World Heritage Sites draw international knowledge and financing, which aids in their preservation.

3. INTERFAITH EXCHANGE

Cultural immersion fosters empathy and an understanding of the diversity's richness among visitors. Tourists on the other hand get to know one another in a better way while attending lectures and sessions together. Promoting interfaith discourse among travellers requires an open mind and a respectful attitude.

4. TRIGGERS GLOBAL TOURISM

In today's fast paced society, everyone wants to experience spirituality and connect with their beliefs. Visiting places of worship is also a symbol of religious examination, cultural exchange and personal growth. Yoga, retreat and meditation are examples of wellness techniques that give visitors a more comprehensive experience.

5. GROWTH OF EMERGING ECONOMIES

It is a major contributor to India's GDP. It also supports locals by creating jobs and improving infrastructure, hospitality and transportation.

6. POSITIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has played an important role in promoting spiritual tourism. Fancy lights, high tech cameras, content has impacted spiritual tourism to a great extent. Latest example being coverage of consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya this year on the social media which was attended by old as well as young people.

7. RISE IN PRAYCATIONS

Majority of hotels, guesthouse and lodges remain busy during the festival season at religious places. Better infrastructure, connectivity, ease of booking online and safe accommodations have made it easy for tourists to access such destinations.

IV.IV. WEAKNESS

1. Lack of infrastructure of lodging, especially during peak festival/religious ceremonies
2. Poor hygiene of surroundings of pilgrimage areas due to over-tourism and rush
3. Poor connectivity of internet during bad weather of remote areas
4. Poor management of carrying capacity due to which places become overcrowded
5. Poor waste management due to overcrowding which leads to poor cleanliness and loses sanctity of such places.

According to IBEF (Indian Brand Equity Foundation, "By 2030, more than one hundred million people will be gainfully employed through temporary and permanent jobs driven by India's Spiritual Tourism alone, which is anticipated to be worth around US \$ 59 billion by 2028. These encouraging figures indicate the bright future of the Indian tourism industry as well its potential. It also emphasizes the necessity of implementing various measures from the government's perspective and other stakeholders because it remains a valuable asset with high prospects, but it requires extra attention to help further accelerate the growth process."

V. CONCLUSION

India rose from 54th place in 2021 to 39th place out of 119 countries in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Index report 2024. Government initiatives and the construction of new infrastructure have contributed to the current surge in spiritual tourism. Many Indian temples are experiencing significant expansion due to spiritual tourism and better infrastructure.

Private players should be motivated for a collaboration with the Government to make spiritual tourism inclusive, transformative, and sustainable in future. The current study mainly concentrated on the secondary data on websites and existing literature. Future research may be done by including empirical data and interviews of tourists.

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