

Prospect and Scope of Pilgrimage Tourism in Jharkhand – An Analysis of Deoghar

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Abstract:

In the present era, Tourism is emerging as an important activity and industry with its vital role in the Indian economy. Jharkhand has tremendous potential for sustainable pilgrimage tourism destinations and Govt. of Jharkhand also has been extending every possible help to develop sustainable tourism in the state. The glory of Jharkhand- Deoghar is a prominent pilgrimage destination. With this point of view the present analysis is based on Deoghar. The care has been taken to highlight and cover all aspects in this analysis. It is believed that this analysis will unfold many hidden facts about Deoghar and pave the way to attract domestic and international tourists and ensure livelihoods, employment, prosperity and income generation for the weaker section of the society turning them into stakeholder in various tourism projects which will go a long way for the prosperity of the region and pilgrimage tourism in the state as well.

Keywords: Pilgrimage Tourism, Deoghar, Babadham, Baidyanath Dham, Jharkhand.

Introduction:

Jharkhand has a tremendous potential of Pilgrimage Tourism. Jharkhand was earlier considered to be only industrial and business state which was full of natural resources, mines and minerals but anyhow pilgrimage tourism was neglected badly. No efforts were being made properly for the upliftment of the pilgrimage destinations. However, in the name of pilgrimage people used to visit only Deoghar (Babadham) that too in the Shrawan month (July-August) mostly. Rest of the year the visit of pilgrimage tourists was very low. In Jharkhand there are also some very famous pilgrimage sites that attract people from all over the world like - Baidyanath Dham, Parasnath, Rajrappa, Maithan, Basukinath, Liloristhan, DeoriMandir, etc. But now Government and local

bodies have understood the importance of pilgrimage tourism and many steps are being taken by them to increase Pilgrimage tourism.

Babadham (Deoghar) is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva. It attracts millions of Hindu devotees in Shrawan month for worshipping Lord Shiva. Not only Babadham (Deoghar) but Parasnath too, situated near to Dhanbad attracts Jain devotees from the different corners of the world. Both destinations have a group of hillocks that attract crowd who are fond of hiking, trekking and adventure in a huge numbers. Other Pilgrimage destinations like Rajrappa and Maithan are also very important and attract many pilgrims and tourists.

Pilgrimage Tourism offers great opportunities for generating revenues, earning foreign exchange and providing employment to people. Presently our country is trying its best to develop pilgrimage tourism in a huge way. Pilgrimage tourism earns over 3.5 trillion worldwide. India's current contribution in global tourist inflow is only 0.37 percent. Pilgrimage Tourism is considered as a representative of peace and worldwide brotherhood and it also helps in protecting cultural manifestations and old monuments and surroundings.

Deoghar (Babadham):

Deoghar district is located in the western portion of Santhal Parganas. It is bounded by Banka and Jamui district in north, Dumka in east, Jamtara in south and Giridih in west. The district contains several clusters of rocky hills covered with forest, but series of long ridges with intervening depressions. The holy city is famous for the Baidyanath Temple (Babadham). The importance of Babadham increases during the month of Shrawan (July – August) when lakhs of devotees, called “Kanwarias” throng the Baidyanath Temple for worship. “Kanwarias” are dressed in saffron color and cover the journey of around 109 km. on foot from Sultanganj to Babadham (Deoghar). They carry the water of holy river - The Ganges from Sultanganj and offer it on Shiva Linga at Babadham (Deoghar). This continues during the whole of Shrawan for 30 days. This is the longest religious fair in the world. People from foreign countries also visit Babadham during Shrawan month. There are 22 temples in the same campus of different God and Goddesses among which Lord Shiva is empowered as being supreme. The temple of Shiva (Baidyanath) is 72 feet tall and it is lotus shaped. Babadham has a legend that it was established by the Demon King Ravana.

Deoghar city is well connected by road and rail and easily accessible from any part of the country. However, apart from pilgrimage tourism Deoghar is a perfect place for pleasure and adventure tourism too. The city of Deoghar and its nearby area is also full of many exciting tourist destinations, where tourists may enjoy Trekking, Ropeway, Wildlife Adventures and a safe natural retreat. Apart from this many Ashrams are there which are famous in the world for its Meditation Camp. It has a huge potential to develop domestic and international tourism.

Positive Impacts:

The biggest positive impact the Pilgrimage Tourism has the creation of job opportunities. Local people are employed in a mass level directly and indirectly in different jobs related to pilgrimage tourism like – Pooja Shops, Flower Shops, Sweet (Prasad) Shops, Monuments and Handicraft Shops, Toys and Gift Shops, Restaurants and Dhabas, Lodges and Paying guest houses, Travel Agencies and so on. It gives birth to many commercial activities and opens up new possibilities of ventures. It attracts the new investors in the city to invest which apart from providing job opportunities to locals also increases the revenue for the city/state. Foreign exchange is one of the factors which also immerge. Many private companies increase the job opportunities by investing in that area by building well-equipped Hotels, Restaurants, Entertainment houses etc. It is only possible when a particular Pilgrimage Spot is identified with its potential to attract more tourists. State Government, Private Companies and Local Bodies all play a very important role in identifying and developing a particular area.

Another positive impact is the development of that area since government provides funds for its development and improvement by - making roads and railway station and connecting it with other parts of the country; making proper sewerage and ensuring supply of drinking water; putting the street lights; proper disposal and waste management system; proper parking place; installing sign boards (where necessary); making parks; systematically constructed shops; making tourist help centers; making guest houses; bus stops and so on. It also helps the municipal councils to earn the revenue by vehicle entry and parking charges and other tourist taxes. This increases the revenue and foreign exchange for that particular area and state as tourist spending provides the necessary income for preserving and managing places of attraction.

Negative Impacts:

Pilgrimage Tourism has multiple negative impacts too. It puts the extra burden of increased expenses on the budget of municipal councils of town in terms of cleaning and safely disposal of garbage, water arrangement and its disposal, lightening, sanitization, providing market place for vendors and so on. It destroys the ecological environment of the city since, the natural resources are consumed rapidly. The movement of vehicles, smoke coming out of the chimneys of hotels, restaurants, generators etc. increases in those areas which creates huge air pollution. In the name of development trees are cut for constructing roads, parks, commercial buildings and hotels etc. and the atmosphere does not remain pleasant any further as it ought to be. This destroys the carrying capacity of the city/spot if the planning is not done properly.

The price of land and buildings increases as soon as development starts taking place and flow of tourist increases in such areas since, investors want to occupy the prime location which is suitable and perfect for their business venture. Retailers and suppliers also increase the prices of their products/services to earn more profit since, mostly tourists have the paying capacity and they pay for it, what is demanded. The price hike of products/services creates dissatisfaction and a gap between tourists and locals. The local people then generally develop the feeling of biasedness towards tourists. Hence, the pricing strategy should be made keeping in mind the locals and their paying capacity.

Another major negative impact is the fickle market. Since, in most of the cases religious/pilgrimage tourism is seasonal and people gather at spot during fixed period of time to celebrate an occasion, due to this the most of the marketers are fickle. They put/install temporary shops only during the particular occasion and do not get a proper business round the year. They try to earn maximum profit from tourists/devotees out of these occasions only.

It puts negative impacts on the transportation services too i.e. on railways and buses. People of the same shrine from different parts of the country want to take participation in such religious events and travel to a particular destination; a huge rush is found in transportation services, especially in railways and buses, which creates the problem of non-availability of berths/seats for other passengers.

Economic Impacts:

First and most obvious impact of pilgrimage tourism is through the visitor's/devotee's contact with the religious institutions at the destination on their visit. However, holy sites are surrounded by religiously/commercially oriented businesses and facilities such as – pooja shops, flower shops, sacrament shops, souvenir shops, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and even medical shops etc. providing employment to the host community. The sale from these shops brings in considerable revenue to the host community, as is the case in Babadham (Deoghar). Deoghar earns Rs. 2500 Crore in 30 days during the Shrawan Mela. The month long earnings keep the district alive and kicking throughout the year or almost. According to a survey, around 50 lakh devotees (Kanwariyas) visit Babadham per year and on an average a devotee spends around Rs. 5000. The numbers of devotees (Kanwariyas) is increasing every year and bring more money and revenue. The “Pedas”, the main sacrament (Prasad) of the festival, bring over Rs. 70 to 80 Crore alone. Around 700 temporary shops come up during the Shrawan month only. The transport business is well over Rs. 100 Crore. The food business contributes over Rs. 100 Crore. The flower business is also attractive and earns over Rs. 5 Crore during the season as all devotees purchase flowers necessarily. Apart from it thousands of shops of confectioners, toys, garment, tea, snacks, utensils, stationary items, etc. have come up around the Babadham Shrine. The district transport department collects around Rs. 1.5 Crore from toll taxes in a month. Pilgrimage Tourism has now become a big business and is one of the fastest growing segments in the tourism industry today.

Socio - Cultural Impacts:

Pilgrimage Tourism can be used as a technique of social and cultural conservation and revitalization. It helps to improve the living standards of people and improves the facilities and services among the community. It also improves the sense of pride among the host population or a sect of shrine about their culture when they find devotees/pilgrims coming to their city/town from different corners of the country or world. It also preserves the pilgrimage shrine, surrounding, and historic sites and develops and maintains museums, theatres and/or cultural centers and events, traditional dances, music, drama, arts and handicrafts unique to the area etc. which helps to earn the huge revenue and financial support for that area by tourist admission fee.

Density of population is also affected drastically of pilgrimage spot and increases the active participation of locals and social organizations towards the facilitation and servicing of tourists/devotees. It also gives birth to the quality education and educates local residents about tourism and its benefits.

Conclusion:

- ☐ Deoghar has huge potential of pilgrimage tourism.
- ☐ 92% people admit that pilgrimage tourism motivate them to travel.
- ☐ 60% people admit that host population will be directly benefited by developing pilgrimage tourism.
- ☐ Pilgrimage tourism creates a lot of job opportunities for the host population and thereby increasing the per capita income.
- ☐ It uplifts the living standard and social status of the host population.
- ☐ It leaves a positive impact on the culture of city and helps in widening of the mentality of the resident people.
- ☐ Pilgrimage tourism attracts new investors in the city to invest which is ultimately raising the job opportunities for people and adding on the infrastructure of the city.
- ☐ It helps in revenue generation for the State Government.
- ☐ Deoghar and its nearby area is full of many exciting tourist destinations which attracts tourists throughout the year.

Recommendations:

- ☐ Well managed pilgrimage destination/spot is important for attracting more tourism.
- ☐ Infrastructure, facilities and services for pilgrimage tourists need to be increased in such destinations like - Deoghar.
- ☐ Quality No. of rooms for accommodating pilgrimage tourists are not sufficient in Deoghar especially during peak season. It needs to be improved.
- ☐ Sometimes pilgrimage tourism creates dissatisfaction and gap between locals and tourists. Hence, local people should not be deprived of the basic facilities. State Government and local authorities need to work out and take proper remedial steps.
- ☐ Pilgrimage tourism is destroying the ecological environment of the Deoghar city especially during Shrawan month when there is huge rush. Main problem is garbage disposal and

excess utilization of natural resources like water. It needs to be taken care of on a serious note.

- ☐ Protection of local culture and custom is very necessary for pilgrimage tourism. Cultural activities are required to be organized to pull more tourists to Deoghar.
- ☐ 90% people realize the need of an airport in the Deoghar. Recently Government has announced the opening of a domestic airport in Deoghar in coming years, which is a commendable step.
- ☐ More special trains and buses should be operated for Deoghar, especially during Shrawan
- ☐ Government should plan, promote and execute more attractive packages to allure more tourists to Deoghar.
- ☐ There is need to construct more Government accommodations, Hotels, Yatri Niwas, etc. to cater to the huge rush of the tourists.
- ☐ Government should pay attention towards increasing Trekking, Wildlife adventure, Mountain climbing etc. activities around Deoghar city to attract more tourists. As of now only Ropeway is being operated at “Trikut Pahar” but that is not enough since, tourists always look for more attractions.
- ☐ Government should also pay attention towards proper security of the tourists as during the peak season like - Shrawan and other festivities when there is a huge crowd, a number of cases of theft and vandalism is recorded.
- ☐ More Tourist help centers are required to be opened in and around Deoghar city
- ☐ Deoghar is famous for Woodcrafts, Metal works, Stone carvings and ornaments, tribal handicrafts, bamboo items, etc. but there is no proper market for the vendors. They sell their items on the roadside. Government should construct a proper market for them.
- ☐ Government should provide more and adequate medical facilities to tourists/devotees especially during Shrawan month when millions of devotees come to Deoghar. Government should always be ready to handle any outbreak of pandemic/epidemic during peak season, which is still lacking.

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