

MARKETING STRATEGY OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN BIHAR – A CASE STUDY OF MITHILANCHAL

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INTRODUCTION:

The pilgrimage has been part of tradition in the civilized societies since ages. It has been source of spiritual enrichment and wider social networking. In Hindus, it is a sacred journey for Moksha. In Bihar we have a splendid circuit of pilgrims with important destinations of deities and sanctuaries. Now there has been an upsurge in pilgrimage in the Mithilanchal region and the tourism has escalated in the recent years.

The tourism and pilgrimage have a history of long debate for their own definitions, but by and large they are accepted as the synonyms. The word ‘tour’ has emerged from the Latin word tournus (later changed to tourn), which meant turning on wheels. The word ‘tour’ is defined by Webster’s dictionary as, “a circular trip usually for business, pleasure or education during which various places are visited and for which an itinerary is usually planned”. According to Encyclopedia of Tourism the definition is, “A tour is now commonly used in two distinct senses, to describe either a day’s trip or excursion or any touristy journey involving a period of travel and overnight stay”.

Tourism in Bihar had always been a part of religious belief and a look out for self actualization. It has been more of pilgrimage tourism. For Hindus, it has been a ritual and sacred journey towards Moksha.

MITHILANCHAL PILGRIMAGE TOURISM: A BRIEF PROFILE:

Bihar enjoys a unique history. It is here that world religious Buddhism and Jainism were born, even as Hinduism thrived. It is here that a prominent proponent of a 4th religious Guru Govind Singh of Sikhs was born. Bihar certainly bears the heavy weight of history; but bears it with much sensitivity and awareness.

The north part of Bihar, known as Mithilanchal is famous for its sacred and fertile soils, erudite scholars, betel leaves, Makhana, Mangoes and sweet tongue of locals. Local women are experts in drawing pictures of different deities for ages with the help of natural vegetable dyes popularly known as “Madhubani painting”.

The landlocked state of Bihar comprises four cultural regions - Bhojpur, Mithila, Magadha and Chotanagpur. Bihar has recently beat the famous state Goa as far as tourism is concerned. The South Asian countries tourists prefer to visit specially Buddhist circuits and Sufi circuits.

There are many famous old temples and monuments in Mithilanchal region which can be improved as destinations of pilgrimage tourism. They are **Dekull dhaxn, Mahinam-Mahadeo-sthan, Raghapur, Sati Asthan, Ahilya Asthan, Saurath, Kapileswarsthan, Kusheshwarasthan, Rameshwari Shyama, (Darbhanga) Ugra Tara Bhagwati Temple Mahishi (Saharsa) Singheshwar Asthan (Madhepura), Phullahar, Uchaitha, Bhawanipur (Madhubani), Janki Temple, Haleshwar Asthan, Panth Pakar, Deokuli, Baghi Math, Pupri, Shukeshwar Asthan (Sitamarhi), etc.**

These above mentioned pilgrimage tourist destinations have lot of potentiality to be developed as a excellent center of pilgrimage tourism. The state as well as Central Govt. must take appropriate initiatives to develop right blend or mixture of marketing mix for the said places.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The pilgrim tourism has given wheels to the economic development of the Mithilanchal region. We can witness a remarkable increase in the entrepreneurial activities and the employment generated in last ten years with the increase in the number of the pilgrimage tourists. The present study aims at identifying the market potential available at Mithilanchal in Bihar particular for the tourism sector where prime focus on pilgrimage tourism. The projects aims at studying the different mistes of marketing and suggesting a good strategic plan for marketing at pilgrimage tourism in a changed present environment. The following objectives have been studied:-

- (i) To identify the market of pilgrimage tourism potential available in Mithilanchal region of Bihar.
- (ii) To study direct and indirect effects of pilgrimage tourism on the economy and the society.
- (iii) To evaluate tourists prefaces for selecting Mithilanchal as an important pilgrim destination.
- (iv) To prepare marketing strategy plans and guidelines for developing and strengthening pilgrimage tourism in Mithilanchal.

- (v) To find out the demand pattern of the tourists for generation of the entrepreneurial activities.
- (vi) To develop suitable marketing mix and strategy for the promotion of pilgrimage tourism in Mithilanchal.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:

Pilgrimage tourism is currently the focus of attention throughout the world and is being recognized as an important instrument of growth for the rural economy. Planner's are using pilgrimage tourism as a tool to increase economic opportunities for the rural people.

In Bihar, where 70 per cent of the population live in rural areas and whose economy is agro-based are dependent solely on agriculture. Newer opportunities need to be created and pilgrimage tourism is certainly on top of the charts for fulfilling this dream. In this research, we shall discuss how pilgrimage tourism will boost economic prosperity for the vast majority of the population.

Mithilanchal region of Bihar has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potential for different segments of tourism like eco-tourism, adventure tourism, farm tourism nature tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism and the like.

Mithilanchal is a vast area of Bihar and it has rich cultural heritage and, civilization. People live together in this area, having different cast, creeds, religion and classes. They speak Maithili language mainly, which has its own dialect and phonetics. In spite of these rooted diversities, they keep peace and harmony which indicate their unity and sincerity for peace. Mithilanchal been attracting both domestic and foreign tourists from the very beginning of its origin. It has oldest tradition of "Athithi Devo Vawaha", which means guests are like God.

Pilgrimage tourism marketing is a safest way to generate the demand and increase the market share. In Mithilanchal we find pilgrimage market emerging as a big market where tremendous opportunities are to be tapped with professionalized efforts.

In a area like Mithilanchal where a number of industries are found sick and the entrepreneurs prefer to shift to neighboring states, pilgrimage tourism can play important role to generate employment opportunities. It is crying need of the hour that policy makers assign due weightage to the promotional strategies for pilgrimage tourism. This diverts our attention on the application of marketing principles in the tourism

industry. Synergy of marketing principles and tourism appears to be a positive solution to bring things on the track.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH:

All pilgrimage tourism destinations in and around Mithilanchal constituted the universe of the research study. Mithilanchal region of pilgrimage centers comprise eight districts. They are Darbhanga Sitamarhi, Madhubani, Purnea, Saharsa, Khagaria, Bhagalpur and Samatipur.

The entire universe is stratified into four strata depending on their geographical area and location. From each area, 10 pilgrimage destinations selected based on judgment or convenience sampling. Observation method was employed to have a first hand knowledge about reality of day-to-day activities involved in pilgrimage tourism. The researchers visited the destination and acquainted with the matter related to the pilgrimage tourism.

HYPOTHESIS:

Now-a-day, a new concept or off-shoots of tourism industry gets impetus and importance. It is essential aspect for long-term sustainable development of rural areas. It promotes a cordial relationship between social and economic developments. So, there is a crying need to manage the pilgrimage tourism by protecting rural temples and monuments which may prove to be beneficial for rural people.

Importance of pilgrimage tourism in an economy where about 70 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas can hardly be exaggerated. The pilgrimage tourism is important not only because of its contribution to the state's income and number of livelihoods dependent on it, but also because of the tremendous potential to generate employment in rural areas of Mithilanchal region of Bihar.

Bihar's economy over the years has experienced little structural change and is not well diversified. It has predominantly agrarian economy with a small manufacturing base. By developing right blend of marketing mix and pilgrimage tourism strategy we can improve the economic condition of Mithilanchal.

The people of Mithilanchal are Smart, energetic and laborious. The pilgrimage tourism will provide them opportunity to believe in the flow of income and to grow, with employment as well as the entrepreneurial activities.

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