



Development of Tourism in Socio-Religious Cultural backdrop of Puri

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Tourism, in the present context, has gathered momentum and emerged as the biggest industry of the future. In Orissa, tourism is an integral part of our tradition and culture. In the olden days, tourism was primarily for pilgrimage - as the holy places attract people from different parts of the country and abroad. Our historical and archaeological monuments continue to be the biggest draw in attracting pilgrims and tourists and provide opportunities to learn about ancient history and culture. People also used to visit these places of importance to participate in different melas, fairs and festivals. In such a background, it developed a socio-religio-cultural tradition where "Atithi Devo Bhava" (the guest is God) became bywords of our social behaviour. A study reveals that about 54% of tourists in India enjoy their stay because of monumental heritage and religious heritage.

The study covers the small temple town of Puri, which is known as both places of tourism and pilgrimage since remote past. Pilgrimage and Tourism both being considered one distinct concept, have been inextricably blended in the cultural fabric of Jagannath Dham. It assumes significance as the seat of Lord Jagannath and constitutes points of attraction for pilgrims and tourists. It is assimilated with various cultural trade with enriched image of universal fraternity symbolised in the holy trinity of Lord Jagannath.

Beside the Grand temple complex, Puri has beautiful blue ocean in its southern side which is unique in India in respect of its scenic beauty. At the same time, the sea of Puri called "Mahodadhi" is the greatest among the Tirthas (Tirtharaj) in which the sacred Daru or the log came floating and ultimately assumed the shape of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan.

Puri sea-beach being shallow, is pleasant for bathing by tourists and the commoners in general, whereas a pilgrim considers it very pious particularly on the auspicious days like Kartika Purnima, solar eclipse, special snana yoga etc. Here the sea has a religious linkage with Lord Jagannath as the God representative visits the sea on each Amabasya day. There are many other shrines and sacred tanks having equal religious and historical importance at Puri which the pilgrims and tourists are required to visit. As a place of pilgrimage, Puri has witnessed a galaxy of Dharmacharyas, saints etc. of different sects from the time that history could reckon. The great Hindu religious preachers like Sankaracharya, Sri Chaitanya and many more have visited Lord Jagannath, established their Mathas and perpetuated their devotion to Lord Jagannath regardless of their sectarian and philosophical differences. At present 169 Mathas and Ashrams have so far been identified belonging to various sects of Hindu community. The Non-Hindu monasteries like Kabir Chaura of Santha



Kabir, Mongu Math and Bauli Math of Guru Nanak, Siddhabakula Math by Jaban Haridas etc. add to the cosmopolitan cultural character and all India socio-religious as well as cultural scenario perceptible in Puri. Therefore, it is rightly called an epitome of Indian culture and an unique syncretism of divergent sects of Hindu Religion.

The historical Town Puri has witnessed many vagaries of the history. The great temple of Lord Jagannath was under Independent Hindu Kings till 1568 A.D. The administrative control has then passed on to Afghans after they invaded Orissa killing the last Hindu Ruler Gajapati Mukunda Deva and continued up to 1590 A.D. Then the province was ceded to Moghul Empire and it continued so till 1803. During this period, the temple and the town were attacked many times by Muslims and the Deities were taken to different inaccessible hide-outs for safety. But most interestingly, though the invasions caused some peripheral effects, they did not affect its intrinsic vitality. Rather it emerged as a potential area for development both structural and cultural.

Puri is also endowed with different colourful festivals throughout the year centering around the ritual system of Lord Jagannath. The Car festival, Dola festival, Chandan Yatra etc. are prominent among them. A large congregation of pilgrims and tourists are found in these festivals. Many eminent foreign tourists like William Bruton in the 16th century, Non-Hindu scholars like Sterling, Fergusson, Beams and emissaries like Buchanon, Lurry and many others have visited the place as an object of tourism.

In view of the increasing tourist influx to the town, strategic development of its

physical growth has not been done at par with the requirements. It is evident from the remotest map of Puri town prepared by the Survey of India in the year 1840-41 that the existing land use for residential and commercial purposes was very less compared to the area it covers. It was mainly concentrated around the temple. The habitable area of the town constituted approximately 7% to 8% of the entire area and the remaining vast land was left as gardens. The grand road was the only major road which was shown in the aforesaid map as "Saradha Balee or Road for Jaggurnauth Rath". The population of the town was 23,837 with 6,620 households. The entire coastal belt was full of gardens with Casurina Plantation. The pilgrims who visited the town were estimated to be 55,000. Presently Puri Development area covers with an area of 63,585 sq. km. which includes the Municipal area and 16 other adjoining revenue villages. Puri is linked with the capital town Bhubaneswar on one side and Konark on the other. Thus it constitutes a Golden Triangle. The present population of the Town comes around 1.55 lacs. with a decadal growth rate of 24%. As such within a span of about a century and a half, its population growth has been seven fold. Due to development of communication and transport facilities, the natural growth of population increased through migration from its hinterland and so also the number of pilgrims and tourists increased substantially and thus it has put stupendous pressure for its physical growth. It is revealed that more than 60% of the total tourists/ pilgrims arriving the state, visit Puri, Of course, it will be fallacious to draw a water-tight compartment for tourism and pilgrimage.



Considering the growth trend of pilgrims and tourists of the town, a strategic policy is required to be worked out. As Puri is basically a place of pilgrimage, a religious environment with modern concept of tourism like "**SPIRITUAL TOURISM**" has to be properly assessed and explored taking with all subsidiary shrines, Mathas and monasteries. Development of tourism should not be limited to hotels and restaurants. The services related to these sectors, cover an extensive range from airport to public conveniences all designed to provide the visitor with a pleasant and delectable experience. It will be more meaningful if the town is provided with good road network, water and sanitation, power supply and telecom facilities. To attract more visitors to the town, entertainment facilities in the evening, development of diversified avenues like amusement parks, water

sports etc. need to be taken up. In addition to this, promotional facilities are to be provided to the traditional dance and music, Folk dance like Naga, Medha (a kind of traditional dance with the mask of God and Goddess.), Martial Art exhibition etc. which is being performed during "Sahi Yatra" on the eve. of Rama Navami every year has to be promoted.

Amid all these above, time has come when we should not popularise our attraction but also assure the visitors that they can have a comfortable stay which will be hassle-free and they will get value of money.



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