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NEPAL TOURISM AND INDIAN ESSENCE



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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry has a growing importance in the social and economic development of a country. The present paper analyses the status of tourism in Nepal and its impact in the socio-economic upliftment of its citizens. It further discusses the contribution of India in the development of tourism in Nepal and its future prospects.

KEYWORDS: Nepal, status of tourism, India contribution.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism has emerged as one of the biggest industry of the world having an enormous impact on the social and economic development of a country. "Travel and Tourism generated US\$ 7.6 trillion (10% of global GDP) and 277 million jobs (1 in 11 jobs) for the global economy in 2014". [1] Tourism has played an important role in destination development. "Developing a network approach of countries in terms of economy generation has also created the opportunities for tourism participating industries to set the standard at the international level". [2] It is a labour intensive industry and foreign exchange earnings are high as import content in this industry is low. Tourism has ever increasing role in building national economy throughout the world. Both India and Nepal have tremendous potential for bilateral cooperation. This field of invisible trade had earlier been largely ignored in discussions on India Nepal relations. It offers unique opportunity to Nepal to meet the increasing demand for foreign exchange arising out of development needs. [3]

Nepal is full of wonderful natural beauty and a dreamland for tourists. Difficult terrain with rivers and dense forests in Nepal has innumerable points of scenic beauty for tourists' attraction. Since time immemorial, its snowy majestic peaks, gushing rivers, lush and green valleys and dense forests in Nepal threw invitation to wandering sages, scholars, monarchs and also to the truth seekers of India. [4]

With a number of places to visit, Nepal has become one of premier tourist destination in South Asia. The tourists have many options to choose from tourist destinations – ancient temples and palaces, tranquil summits and wildlife wonders. In Nepal enchantment is predominant, offering something for everyone – tourists, artists, trekkers, hikers, sportspersons, nature lovers, scholars and the weary in search of a personal Shangri-La. 240 snowy peaks attract the mountaineers and trekkers. It remains a year round destination for every mood and choice. [5]

Nepal being a landlocked country, and connectivity in the entire country still far from ideal, tourism in the middle of the twentieth century was quite limited, primarily to mountaineers and low budget youth. With the growth of connectivity, both within the country and with the Indian border, the tourism sector had grown too, but still dependent on the tourist conditions in India and neighboring countries. The tourism industry staggered

with expansion, mainly due to limits of infrastructure, irregularity of incentives, and half-hearted approach on part of the government, making it dependent on finances for tourism by the World Bank, and with no overseas promotion, dependent on private sector for publicity. Still, tourism was the major source of foreign exchange, and the government followed objectives from 1975 Five year plan to improve the tourism, increase the foreign exchange and provide employment in handicrafts sector. The sale of local handicrafts is a prosperous industry largely based on the tourism industry in the region. The sale of carpets, to some extent is also based on the tourism industry. The results achieved by the turn of the century marked the strides made in the tourism industry by the Nepal's tourist department: tourism becoming the top foreign exchange earner for the country. [6][7]

Recognition of the importance of tourism in the development of economy and earning foreign exchanges, and efforts into planning and promoting tourism led to the country being able to take advantage of its unique tourist attractions, not just in the Kathmandu valley, but also in less developed areas like Pokhara (which provides a gateway to Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges), and Lumbini (the birthplace of Buddha). Development of air traffic infrastructure and its connectivity to major tourist destinations has resulted in growth in tourist influx directly into Nepal, and not via India. [8]

Buddhism is a great tourist attraction today but Nepal, the birth place of Buddha and India, the place where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment have not jointly or individually adequately promoted or marketed it. The Buddhist Circuit in India and Nepal needs to be developed as one complementary circuit. Viable collaboration between India and Nepal involving the national carriers, domestic and international can link Buddhist Circuit. [9]

The Air Services Agreement between Nepal and India was signed in 1960s. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Air Services Agreement was signed between India and Nepal in June, 1997. It increased the air seat capacity from 4000 per week to 6000 per week; India also gave two additional destinations for the designated airlines of Nepal, Lucknow and Bangalore. But Nepal's ailing flag carrier the Nepal Airlines Corporation (NAC) has not been able to fly either to Lucknow or Bangalore. Nepal's religious, cultural, linguistic and other similarities coupled with exoticism of the Himalayas serves to make Nepal one of the most popular destinations of an average Indian middle class tourist. Moreover there are daily flights and the Indian currency is also easily exchanged. No visa is required for an Indian citizen in Nepal. During the time of Shiv Ratri festival, thousands of Indian pilgrims in bus loads arrive in Kathmandu for a darshan of the Pashupatinath Temple. But Nepal needs to promote innovative approaches to lure Indian tourists whose options today are many and at affordable prizes.[10]

Cross border infrastructure between India and Nepal are of paramount importance for the establishment of strong economic engagement in the area. However, this has yet to receive adequate focus and commitment to boost up the trade, tourism and other economic activities between the two nations. Extension of Indian Railways at the proximity of the Nepal border, and better road networks to link national highways in both countries near the border can serve to provide better connectivity. Currently, cross border railway projects are numbered at two, with prospects for three more, though there is potential to reach at least dozen. [11]

Wilderness and adventure activities in the jungles, terai, waterways and mountains of Himalayas have made Nepal a hotspot for ecotourism and adventure tourism. Nepal can attract many tourists on its ecotourism policy alone. More and more travelers are now looking for new and unique experiences in travel and India and Nepal can provide such uniqueness. Nepal is synonymous with adventure and Indian products can supplement the attraction of such adventure. Since wildlife attracts tourists, Nepal has made strides in aiding its tourism with the help of preserved wildlife. Giving half of the tourism dollar collected to local communities near wildlife preserves, the government has been able to curb the poaching of rhinos, elephants and tigers and thus the transnational crime of illegal trade and trafficking. [12] The tourism industry, the largest source of foreign exchange and revenue [13], and one of the ways to alleviate poverty and achieve social equity, brings to Nepal each year around \$471m [14]. Except for a few years, when the insurgency affected the tourism quite adversely, the number of international tourists arriving in Nepal has with small fluctuations grown over the years. The growth had been slow till the first half of the first decade of 21st century (less than 100 thousand increase from 1991 to 2006), however it rose rapidly in the coming decade by nearly 300 thousand [15]. The series of

earthquakes that jolted Nepal in 2015 followed by Madhesi Movement in the same year also affected the tourism badly, though only temporarily, as the number of tourists in 2016 rose up close to the figures of 2014 [16]. By broad origin, the number of Indian tourists composes a significant percentage of the number of tourists arriving in Nepal (near 15%). However, in the recent years, Chinese tourists have also started visiting Nepal in comparable numbers to their Indian counterparts. [17][18][19][20] Figure 1 gives an account of the tourist arrival in Nepal by country from 2000 to 2015.

Over the years, the months of October and March have witnessed the maximum arrival of tourists, with both Indian and third country tourists favoring the autumn season. Among the various purposes of visit, holiday pleasure, trekking and mountaineering, and pilgrimage are the foremost. [21][22] The tourism for holiday pleasure and pilgrimage have risen in their numbers over the decades, however mountaineering tourists have gone down over the years. According to the data provided by the Dept. of National Park and Wildlife Conservation, a significant percentage of the tourists also visit the national parks and conservation areas in the Himalayan state, and the number has grown over the years. Lumbini, the most visited pilgrimage by foreigners, preferred to be visited in the months of February, was visited by nearly 17% Indians and other country's tourists each during the year 2015 [23]. Figure 2 gives an account of the Month-wise trend of tourist arrivals during the years 2011 to 2015.

The tourism industry is a significant source of revenue generation in Nepal. This had been particularly true for the Maoist insurgents, the rebels fighting the government since 1996, and welcoming the foreign tourists to collect taxes from them. However, the guerilla conflict, Maoist organized strikes and the nine year insurgency, despite the safety assurances from the Government tourism officials and the restrictions imposed on political organization by the proclamation of emergency by King Gyanendra, had led to a radical decrease in the tourism in Nepal. The year 2005 saw a reduction of 34 percent tourists in the peak first four months of the year compared to the previous year, according to Nepal Tourism Bureau. In the same period, number of tourists visiting Nepal from India too reduced by 37 percent. [24]

The revenue generated by the tourism sector is measured as foreign currency exchange made by tourists (around 80%) and tourism industries. According to the Nepal Rastra Bank report, the total foreign currency exchange stood at USD 488,030 thousand, higher than that estimated for 2014. The gross foreign exchange earnings from tourism have steadily grown since 2004-05 (when it fell drastically because of heightened insurgency and emergency imposition) except for small differences in fiscal year 2010-11. However, the series of earthquakes that jolted Nepal in 2015 followed by Madhesi Movement in the same year affected the tourism very badly and the gross foreign exchange earnings from tourism declined to 41,765,400 thousand NRs in 2015-16 as compared to 53,428,800 thousand NRs in 2014-15. [25] This was, however, a temporary phase as during the year 2016-17, the gross foreign exchange earnings from tourism rose to 55,453,417 thousand NRs. Figure 3 gives an account of the gross foreign exchange earnings from tourism during the period 2000-01 to 2014-15.

According to the annual research carried out by the World Travel & Tourism Council, Travel and Tourism contributed to 4.3% of GDP directly (NPR83.7bn) with a total contribution of 8.9% of GDP in 2014, 4.0% of GDP directly (NPR85.3bn) with a total contribution of 8.1% of GDP in 2015, and 3.6% of GDP directly (NPR85.2bn) with a total contribution of 7.5% of GDP in 2016. The direct contribution consists of the total spending on tourism by individuals as well as government for tourism services like museums, adventure and wildlife activities, etc. using measures consistent with the definition of Tourism GDP as given in the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework (TSA: RMF 2008). The total contribution also consists of the indirect and induced impacts on the economy, where indirect contribution includes GDP and job involved in direct dealing with the Tourism, and induced contribution includes the GDP and jobs supported by spending of those involved directly or indirectly with the Tourism. [26] [27] [28]

Employment generation is also a significant purpose served by the tourism industry. Hotels- stay and restaurants, transportation, and tourist services are key areas where employment is generated by the tourism industry. Except for small reductions in the years 2009-2010 and 2011-2012, the share of employment by the tourism industry has grown over the decades since the declaration of emergency. The earthquake in 2015 too led

to a reduction in employment during 2015-2016, but saw an increase in the following year. About 2.9% of total employment, roughly 427,000 jobs were generated by the Tourism sector in the year 2016, and this growth is expected to be present in the tourism sector to support 1,325,000 jobs by the next ten years. [29][30][31]

CONCLUSION

Nepal is having abundant resources of Natural and cultural Touristic product but the Government has not been very successful to manage the opportunities. Nepal government needs to focus more on promoting Nepal destination market and also needs to put investment forward in tourism infrastructures, scientific destination management, provide fame of securities among foreign and domestic tourists. Nepal need to co-operate with international tourism forum and neighbouring countries (India, China,...) to cash its natural tourism endowment. [32] As in the recent years Chinese tourists are also visiting Nepal in comparable numbers to their Indian counterparts and the prospects of Nepal and Tibetan autonomous regions (China) cooperation in the tourism industry on account of Chinese 'one Belt one road' strategy; India need more to focus on collaboration with Nepal to develop the tourism industry. On account of its unique open border relation with Nepal, India has promising opportunity for investment in the expansion of hotel capacity, establishment of projects such as restaurants and health resorts, development of other facilities such as water sports, amusement park, golf, creation and strengthening of transport facilities both by land and air. Nepal government has proposed to celebrate the year 2018 as 'Visit Nepal Year' aiming to bring one million international tourists in a year; emphasizing on upgradation of tourist destinations, identification and infrastructure development as well as marketing of new destinations, preservation of historical, cultural and religious heritage sites, development of mobile information system, linking of tourist destinations with the International Buddhist Circuit, construction of additional airports and upgradation of Tribhuvan International Airport and implementation of strict air safety standards.[33] Indian skills and technologies can help Nepal in its efforts on this account and this could be a mutually rewarding economic partnership between our two countries.

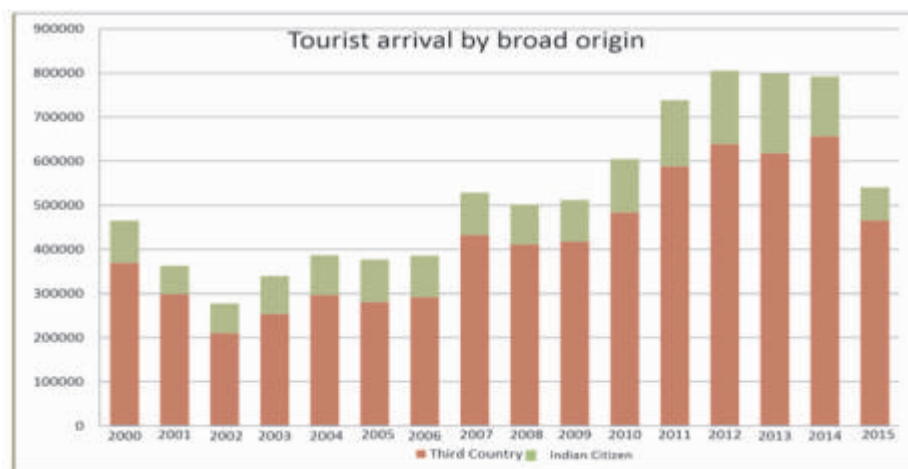


Figure 1. Number of Indian Tourists arriving into Nepal (Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 2015)

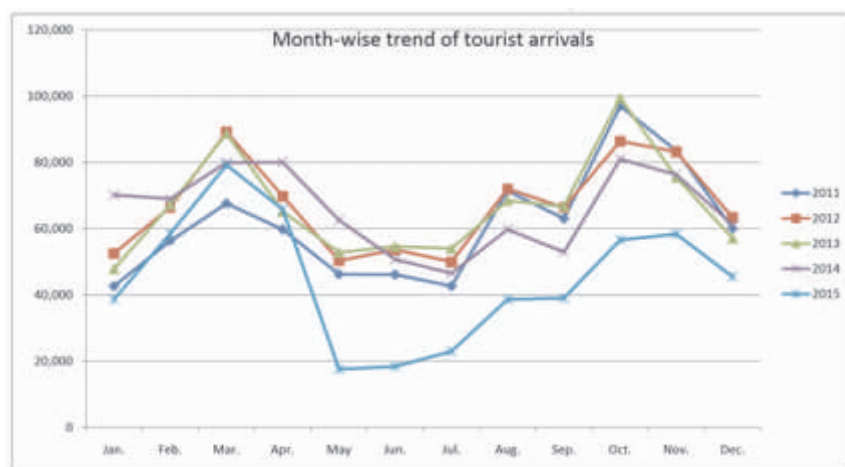


Figure 2. Tourist arrivals peak in the months of October and March. (Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 2015)



Figure 3. Net revenue generation in NRS (Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics 2015)

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