

Consequences of Covid- 19 in Hindu Pilgrimage Tourism Places in Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

This paper explores the COVID-19 pandemic impacts and overview of related literature on pilgrimage tourism and it also aims to give suggestions for future rejuvenation of Hindu pilgrimage tourism. Tamil Nadu is a southern Indian state noted for its temples dedicated to numerous Hindu gods and goddesses. The state has towering temples with magnificent architecture, paintings, sculptures, different cultures, fairs and festivals which attract millions of tourists every year. Pilgrimage tourism is one of the most profitable and positive economic outcomes for the state, especially it helps to increase in Gross Domestic Product, to earn foreign exchange earnings, to create direct and indirect employment for the people and to create a market for local handicrafts. The COVID-19 pandemic impacts every sector in the world; especially the tourism industry in developed and developing countries are badly affected because of universal speared. It has enforced the worldwide curfew which is highly impacted on tourism-related services like transportation, accommodations, hotels and restaurants, tour operators and travel agents, tourists guide, small and medium businesses and petty shops in and around the pilgrimage sites. The religious sites have closed their doors for devotees and many religious leaders appealed to their followers not to perform their spiritual spreading of the virus is high due to overcrowding as well as religious mass gathering and pilgrims come to take bath in the holy water in reveres which was stopped for the precautionary measure when the people come back from mass gathering to their home town to control the spread of the pandemic. The pandemic impact on religious tourism has been immeasurable and many religious places are also changing their rituals and have altered the thinking and beliefs of religious leaders and pilgrimage visitors worldwide.

Keywords: Consequences of COVID 19, Hinduism, Religious, Hindu Pilgrimage Tourism.

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) designated the COVID 19 outbreak a global health emergency on January 30, 2020, according to Medscape. When the WHO declared a health

emergency and urged all countries to take appropriate steps to safeguard their people from the virus, the COVID 19 outbreak captured the attention of the mainstream media and the general public. To combat the disease's spread, most European nations adopted China's lockdown policy of restricting physical contact (Chen et al., 2020). Coronavirus spreads quickly from person to person through respiratory droplets. This has just been discovered in the saliva of infected individuals. As a consequence, saliva plays an important role in viral transmission, and noninvasive salivary diagnostics has been proven to be a valuable and cost-effective point-of-care platform for detecting viral infection rapidly and correctly (Sabino Silva et al., 2020). As a consequence, infected people spread COVID 19 to others before becoming symptomatic and adopting preventive measures such as self-quarantine, social isolation, and wearing a face mask. In many countries, undiagnosed carriers and asymptomatic infected individuals, as well as limited diagnostic facilities, are major drivers of the virus's spread (Li et al., 2020). Following the Globe Health Organization's classification of COVID 19 as a worldwide pandemic, governments all around the world have implemented regional and local emergency travel restrictions. People were advised to remain at home, and social events were forbidden (The New York Times 2020a). Many events, such as conferences, conventions, and sports leagues, were cancelled or postponed, causing havoc on national economies, including domestic and international tourism, air travel, public transit, hotels and motels, and sporting events, such as the postponed Tokyo Olympics (NZ Herald, 2020). Over the past several decades, tourism has emerged as one of the most significant drivers of economic development in both developing and developed nations. Tourism benefits the economy in a number of ways, including the acquisition of foreign money, the attraction of international investment, the increase of tax revenues, and the creation of new employment opportunities (Alam, 2016). As a consequence, increasing tourism is beneficial to the economy, and promoting ecological civilization building, sustainable, and green development is the fundamental content. It is also pushed in the tourist sector. Since the 1980s, visionary people have defined the idea and features of sustainable tourism (Tang, 2013), and it has gradually developed into a study subject. Tourism destinations, on the other hand, serve as a geographical carrier of tourism, and their assessment and development have become study focuses.

2. Pilgrimage in Hinduism

Touring is an outward excursion in geographical space undertaken mainly for the purpose of recreation or education. The traditional definition of pilgrimage is an inner journey manifested in outside space, in which the immanent and transcendent unite to create a multidimensional experience.

Humans, in general, need both outward and inward movement. Titha-Yatra, or "tour of the sacred fords," is an old and historic pilgrimage practise in Hinduism, or more specifically Sanatana dharma, the everlasting religion, that used to refer to pilgrimages that included holy washing in water sources as a symbolic cleansing process. Pilgrimage is a process in which people attempt to understand the world around them, and religion is central to the pilgrim's objectives, commitments, and activities. Because India has so many Hindu sanctuaries and pilgrimage is so common, the whole country might be considered as a large holy place organised into a system of pilgrimage centres and their environs (Bhardwaj, 1973). According to the Mahabharata (13.111.18), a fifth-century BCE epic that contains the sacred book Bhagavad Gita, pilgrimage sites are lucky for Hindus because of the exceptional strength of their soil, the efficacy of their water, and the fact that they were proclaimed holy by sage visits (Bhardwaj 1973; Sharpley et al., 2005). Locations generate distinct holy places or sacredscapes as a consequence of the combined processes of socialisation, reutilization, and greater interconnectivity. Pilgrimages are considered as the most significant and noble rites of passage in Hinduism because they have the ability to establish a lasting connection between the human mind and the spirit of nature (Singh, 1995). The first stage of a Hindu pilgrimage is initiation, which takes place between the time one decides to embark on the journey and the time one departs; the second stage is liminality, which includes the journey itself and the experiences encountered; and the third stage is re-aggregation, which takes place when one returns home. Both faith-building and travel are motivated by the human need to find tranquilly and explore holy ground (Singh, 2005). Pilgrimages are essential in Hinduism because they enable people to feel the power of place (Jacobsen, 2012). Pilgrimage is a Hindu ceremonial practise that represents a pilgrim's participation in the spiritual world while also actively fostering a two-way connection between the pilgrim and the divine. Many pilgrimage sites attract visitors because they have a reputation for providing a one-of-a-kind spiritual, social, or material benefit, usually in the form of soul, mind, and body cleansing and healing (Stoddard, 1997). Hindu pilgrimage, on the other hand, is a communal duty, a rite of passage, and a means of gaining favour, as well as a quest for spiritual, mystical, and true truth (Sopher 1987). Holy places, sacred time, sacred meaning, and sacred rituals are all part of the luminal faithscape that has been created. Tirthas are the most significant Hindu pilgrimage destinations. The word "tirtha" literally means "ford" or "river crossing," and it refers to places where people may travel between the ordinary and spiritual worlds (Bhardwaj et al., 2004). Each Hindu pilgrimage is a tirthayatra (tirtha trip), and each tithayatra conjures a landscape with spiritual and symbolic meaning for devotees on both a physical and spiritual level. Hindu pilgrims often see their holy journeys as both physical and spiritual experiences (Sax, 1991). Pilgrimage is the geographical expression of an outward trip in

geographical space, while travel is the geographical manifestation of an interior journey. Pilgrimage is about reconciling spiritual and material aspirations in locations where the immanent and the transcendent clash. If tourism is mainly concerned with seeking pleasure and gratifying curiosity, pilgrimage is concerned with integrating spiritual and worldly aspirations in locations where the immanent and the transcendent meet. Nowadays, most holy sites feature hybrid settings that combine religious and ordinary elements in complicated, sometimes contradictory ways. Each sacredscape, which comprises holy sites, religious ritual performances, and religious authorities (Vidyarthi et al., 1979), is intertwined with the socioeconomic-environmental characteristics of the contemporary world, forming the whole of a geographical faithscape (Singh, 2013). The contemporary pilgrim visitor is often viewed with ambivalence at Hindu sacred sites. Many pilgrims are apprehensive of being turned into a tourist attraction rather than a religious experience, and ancient locations such as Kerala's Jagannath Temple and Padmanabhawamy Temple purposefully reject perceived outsiders (Prasad, 2010). Despite their richness, variety, and potential, few geographers have examined the deep connections that exist between Hindu religion, culture, spirituality, and tourism, especially cultural and religious tourism. Nonetheless, pilgrimage sites and associated festivals remain a significant source of domestic and international tourist traffic, as well as historical and conservation interest. Of course, the increased emphasis on sacred site maintenance represents the rebirth, reinterpretation, and modernization of a once-repressed Hindu culture. It is influenced by commercial responses to contemporary sensibilities as well as current cultural trends. For example, the majority of contemporary religiously motivated travel to holy sites is combined with a modern, middle-class, urbane, new-age spirituality, putting non-traditional demands on historic site infrastructure (Timothy et al., 2006). Millions of Hindus travel to India and other areas of the globe each year to participate in major festivals, pilgrimage circuits, and ritual cleansings (Kaur, 1982, 1985; Singh, 2004). Every year, thousands of people of various faiths visit India to admire the country's ancient and beautiful Hindu architecture, as well as significant historical sites connected to the religion (Gupta, 1999; Ichaporia, 1983).

3. COVID-19 Outbreak on Tourism and Pilgrimage Tourism

The 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, and previous pandemics such as the 2009 swine flu and the 2011 earthquake in north-eastern Japan all caused havoc on tourism and related industries (Kato, 2018). As a result of these experiences, risk management toolkits have been developed to cope with risk reduction and crisis recovery (e.g.,

Lynch, 2004), as well as contemporary industry resilience changes (e.g. Lynch, 2004). Hall et al. (2018) However, as compared to earlier crises, the present covid-19 epidemic is much more severe in scale due to its global reach and extensive closure of travel businesses and daily routine operations. Covid-19 will have a long-term effect on the tourist industry, particularly religious tourism, with major economic, social, and physical ramifications for both domestic and international tourists. The first effect was tremendous, with significant reductions in economic growth and employment. Religious tourism accounts for a major part of India's tourist revenues; the outbreak's prohibition on holy gatherings and the closure of all religious sites has had a severe effect on religious tourism in India. Hotel and hotel bookings for pilgrimage destinations have dropped across the board, with many people postponing their plans (The Economic Times, 2020). During the shutdown, hotels and travel companies would lose a lot of money. Various governments have chosen to shut all major religious tourist sites, including the Siddhivinayak temple and Vaishno devi, forcing people to postpone their trips and resulting in a reduction in trade (Chopra, 2020). The Indian Ministry of Tourist has organised a series of webinars called Dekho Apna Desh (Explore Your Nation) to highlight India's many regions and their key USPs (unique selling propositions) in the tourism sector (ministry of tourism, government of India, 2020). According to the Indian government's tourism ministry, bookings and overnight stays at pilgrimage sites in India dropped by 80% in January and February. High-level representatives from the public and private sectors, as well as international organisations such as the World Health Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, IATA, and the World Travel and Tourism Council, attended a meeting chaired by the Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which expressed grave concerns about the decline in r (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2020). Religious tourism will be badly impacted all around the globe, and market data indicates that recovering all kinds of travel, including religious tourism, would take a long time. Worship services have been cancelled, all worship venues have been closed, and pilgrimages to religious observances and festivals have been cancelled as a consequence of the epidemic (Daniel, 2020). In the middle of the pandemic, the vast majority of religious tourism stakeholders have started to worship through live broadcasts. The restriction on religious tourism has caused a host of concerns and obstacles, including lost income for local companies and a chilling impact on people's religious feelings. Because of the pandemic, several Hindu festivities, including the holy Navaratri and Ram Navami, had to be cancelled (Burke, 2020).

4. Outline of Pilgrimage Tourism in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is a state in southern India, surrounded on the north by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, on the east by the Bay of Bengal, on the south by the Indian Ocean, and on the west by Kerala. The history of Tamil Nadu may be traced all the way back to the Paleolithic era. Tamil is the state's official language, and it is one of the world's oldest languages, influenced by the state's long and illustrious past. Today, the state speaks a variety of languages, including English, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, and other Indian dialects. The towering temples that dot the landscape show that Tamil Nadu has a long heritage of art and building. Chera, Chola, Pandiya, and Pallava were all fascinated by art and architecture, especially the gopuram (tower) (report of Tamil Nadu Tourism 2013-14). Tamil Nadu is a state with a rich cultural heritage and a lengthy history. Bharadhanatyam and carnatic music have thrived here for millennia. The magnificent sculptures at Mahabalipuram's seashore temple, as well as their pristine beauty everywhere in the nation, speak eloquently about the Tamil people's long heritage. Handicrafts contain some of the most beautifully carved patterns in woods, stone, and metal.

Tamil Nadu is known as the "Land of Pilgrimage," and it has long been a popular destination for spiritual seekers from throughout the globe. Many temple sculptures, inscriptions, and temple structures in Tamil Nadu date from 800 to 5000 years ago, and they convey stories about Hindu history and culture. Kancheepuram, Vellankani, Mahabalipuram, Trichy, Chidambaram, Pondicherry, Tanjore, Tiruvannamalai, Madurai, Rameshwaram, Meenakshi temple, Ramanadha Swamy temple, Brahadeeswara temple, Partha Sarathy temple, Dhandaudhapani temple, Swami Malai, Kabaleeswarar temple, Mailapur temple, Kanyakumari, in Tamil Nadu, has long been a famous pilgrimage site. Meenakshi temple complex in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, is one of India's most impressive temple complexes. In Varanasi, the Ramanathaswamy temple is recognised as a sacred site. It is one of India's most important Hindu sanctuaries. Since 2014, Tamil Nadu has become a popular tourist destination for both domestic and foreign visitors. In the 2018 fiscal year, the state collected 39 crore in domestic tourism and 61 lakh in international tourism. Sri Dhandayuthpani Swamy temple in Palani, Dindigul district, for example, receives about one crore in cash offerings in addition to nearly an equal amount from the sale of panchamritham, Sri Kapaleswarar temple, Sri Parthasarathy Swamy temple, Vadapalani Murugan Temple, Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple in Madurai, and Sri Bhagawthy Sundareswarar temple in Madurai are among the state' The COVID19 pandemic has had a significant impact on religious tourism in Tamil Nadu, and holy places all throughout the state have been closed to darshan since March 24, when the government imposed a

lockdown to prevent the virus from spreading. As the virus dances to its death, devotional music, nadaswaram, and thavil become silent, and temples lament the worshipers who walk in asking forgiveness for some mistake. Only priests were allowed to perform pujas and other rituals in the temple during the lockdown. Because of the minimal money generated by the lockout, several temple authorities have requested that the government forgive the energy expense. Temples, on the other hand, not only sustain the devout's faith, but also help the local community generate long-term revenue. Despite numerous unlocking attempts, the epidemic has had a significant impact on state religious tourism and its economic impact, as well as the livelihoods of lakhs of workers like as street vendors, hawkers, temple priests, tour guides, and taxi drivers. In India, tourism created 39,821 million jobs in 2019, accounting for 8.0 percent of total employment, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) 2020. The worldwide tourist sector has been devastated by the COVID 19 outbreak. The tourist sector is expected to lose at least USD 22 billion and 50 million jobs as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. Tamil Nadu is a one-of-a-kind state with a plethora of religious attractions. For both foreign and domestic tourists, it is the most popular tourist destination. Tamil Nadu, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, is India's top tourist destination.

The Indian tourist sector is estimated to lose Rs. 1.25 trillion in income in calendar 2020 as a result of hotel closures and plane cancellations following the outbreak and spread of the viral pandemic. In 2019, India received 10.9 million international tourist arrivals, generating Rs 210,971 crore in foreign exchange income, with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi accounting for over 60% of total international visitor arrivals. The Indian domestic and international travel and tourist sectors are expected to suffer a substantial setback in 2020, with travel restrictions in place for more than 80 countries and most major airline flights stopped, as well as a lockdown in effect until March 31, 2020. The country's COVID19 shutdown, which has impacted a variety of industries, has yet to reach Tamil Nadu's temples, who have lost crores of rupees in income due to "Hundiya" offerings. Since their doors were closed to the public for darshan in March 2019, and the Tamil Nadu government ordered a shutdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus in April 2021, the temples have had no other means of generating revenue. Regardless of the current fiscal position, some of the big temples may be obliged to pay a greater charge to manage the other temples, since they always satisfy the requests of the lower-income temples. Around 150 temples that are considered important in terms of money generated via hundial collecting and other activities have reported a complete reduction in revenue. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HRCE) manage 36,612 temples around the state, with rich temples using their surplus revenues to finance conservation, renovation, and restoration. According to the source, each of the big temples has lost

between Rs. 40 lakh and Rs. 1 crore in cash offerings during the lockout, although an exact assessment of the income loss would have to wait until the lockdown is removed and normality resumes. Temple priests in Tamil Nadu have been among the most impacted by the COVID 19 epidemic. Priests across the state are performing daily agamas rituals in the morning and evening despite the lack of worshipers. The government is limiting the number of pilgrims who visit major temples, according to a priest who performs rites at weddings, housewarmings, and other events. During the shutdown, almost all fortunate days were gone. The priests of most temples rely entirely on activities such as weddings, housewarmings, and other religious ceremonies. As a result of the entire lockdown, several events planned for Sunday were cancelled or rescheduled. During this period, almost a lakh domestic devotees from neighbouring regions and towns would travel to the temple to participate in the cultural spectacle, but the temple kept a low profile due to the lockdown restrictions. The temple priests' livelihoods were severely impacted as a result. Devotees donate regularly to the Annadhanam project, which was backed by the late chief minister J Jayalithaa. This strategy is currently being implemented to feed the poor in the communities surrounding the temples that have been closed due to the government shutdown. Due to a Tamil Nadu government decision to prevent the spread of coronavirus, many religious activities in the state have been completely cancelled by temple officials. Karthigai Deepam, Vinayaka Chaturthi, Chithirai Brahamostavam, Mahamaham festival, Thiruvathirai are all significant Tamil Nadu festivals, and many local people that rely solely on outside temples have lost their livelihoods.

5. Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on tourism and pilgrimage tourism has been enormous, with fewer international and local tourists arriving, resulting in lower demand for accommodations and cancellation of other events such as weddings and conferences. Priests' employees, flower sellers, and tiny eateries at pilgrimage centres, local hotels, restaurants, and street vendors have all lost their jobs as a result of the tight ban on religious gatherings. Religious sites are reopened and allow devotees with specific conditions after a protracted rigorous lockdown prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, and religious places will be struck by the COVID-19 second wave before recovering from the first wave. Due to the development of the second wave of coronavirus, religious institutions across the country are now shuttered. Religious places in India have seen a large influx of people due to strong religious sentiments, and people visit religious places for a variety of reasons, including participating in religious festivals, fulfilling vows, and celebrating an auspicious

event with family, all of which contribute to the virus spreading. India has become a worldwide hub for the COVID 19 pandemic, with the world's largest daily new infections in recent days as it battles a second wave of the epidemic. To prevent the fast spread of coronavirus infections, some states and union territories have imposed harsh restrictions on the public, including lockdown, weekend lockdown, and night curfews. At the time of writing, 2.416.2 crore individuals were infected with the virus, with 33.5 million of them dying throughout the world. Pilgrimage tourism destinations must enhance some services and raise public awareness, and pilgrims should follow the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations to wear a face mask, use hand sanitizers, keep social distance, and wash their hands often. Tourism authorities and the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department (HRCE) must protect and take effective measures to promote tourism and religious tourism. We also need to aggressively accelerate the vaccination programme, making it much easier for the public to receive vaccination both in and out of hospitals, which will aid religious tourism.

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