

# Pilgrim Tourism and Transportation- Opportunities, Problems and Challenges

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## INTRODUCTION

Pilgrims of all castes and classes of different states and countries have devotion and faith in the matter of religious worship. It is believed that there is a sacred aim behind this and that aim is to fulfill the desire of obtaining "Punya" (merit) and to get rid of "Paap" (sin) apart from their personal motives. The pilgrims coming from different areas and castes stay together and all of them observe the rules and tradition of that faith-religious recitations, sacred fasts, restriction on food and diet. Tourism has always been one of the popular modes of recreations for mankind. Instances of people traveling to places other than their home town, state or country to take a break from their routine lives have been common from centuries. Places and countries such as Los Angeles, Las Vegas, California, Paris, Tokyo, Cairo, London, Switzerland, The Hawaiian, France, The British Isles, Italy, South Africa, Bali and The Maldives are some of the most visited and popular destinations across the globe due to their natural grandeur or historical significance (V. Sarvani et al. 2007). Tourism is a basic and most desirable human activity which deserves the praise and encouragement of all people and all governments (Rome, 1963). It is an industry concerned with attracting people to a destination, transporting them there, housing, feeding and entertaining them upon arrival and returning them to their homes (Negi, 1998). Tourism industry has been accepted as the second largest industry after oil. Tourism is the greatest producer of world gross domestic product and employment, and plays a significant role in promotion of mutual understanding between the people of the world and in maintenance of peace through people to people exchanges and thus contributes to the prosperity of many countries and regions (Bagri, 2003). India's tourist arrivals increased from 3.92 million in 2005 to 4.43 million in 2006 (an increase of 13%). By showing the same pace of growth, it touched the figure of 5 million in 2007. Foreign Exchange earnings from Tourism also increased from \$ 5730.86 million in 2005 to \$ 6569.34 million in 2006 and reached the figure of \$ 9 billion in 2007 with the growth rate of 33% as against the corresponding period in 2006. The Govt. of India gave a special thrust on improving the quality of tourism infrastructure in the country. During the 10th plan period (2002-07), the tourism infrastructure development projects worth Rs. 1925 crore were sanctioned for 1113 tourism projects spread throughout the country. During 2005-06, 246 projects amounting to Rs. 600 crore were approved. The development of Tourism in independent India as an economic activity started with the establishment of Tourist Traffic branch in 1949 in the then Ministry of Transport of the Union Government (Goswami et al. 2003). The Indian market is not just that it is growing rapidly, the growth forecasts suggest that its growth may outpace that of China in the foreseeable future. Tourism studies the travel motives while focusing on the destination, its type, needs and types of travelers (Woodside, 1988). It is a fact that the Indian middle classes- the segment showing the strongest growth- are educated and knowledge of English is widespread, which makes foreign travel so much more accessible and enjoyable. While many countries do require visas of Indians- and this is one of the main deterrents to travel; Indians are also (unlike the Chinese) relatively free to travel independently, where and when they wish. And they are allowed to take up to US\$10,000 a year out of the country for holiday travel. Finally, the Indian market is generally a much easier market in which to work than China.

## PILGRIM TOURISM IN INDIA

India is a vast country with a wide variety of tourist attractions which makes its presence on the world tourism map. Tourism as an industry brings many advantages as it not only benefits the urban agglomerations but also boosts the rural economy. India is known as a country of fairs and festivals. It is said that there is hardly a day in the course of a year when a fair or festival is not being celebrated in some part of the country. These fairs and festivals are a source of wonder and amazement to tourists and in turn provide a huge source of revenue and employment to the country. The tourism traffic (both domestic and international) for various purposes like ethnic, socio-cultural understanding; pleasure, environmental change, and religious purpose has increased significantly in recent times. It is the pilgrimage or "tirath yatra" or tourism for religious purpose that has caused people to travel for

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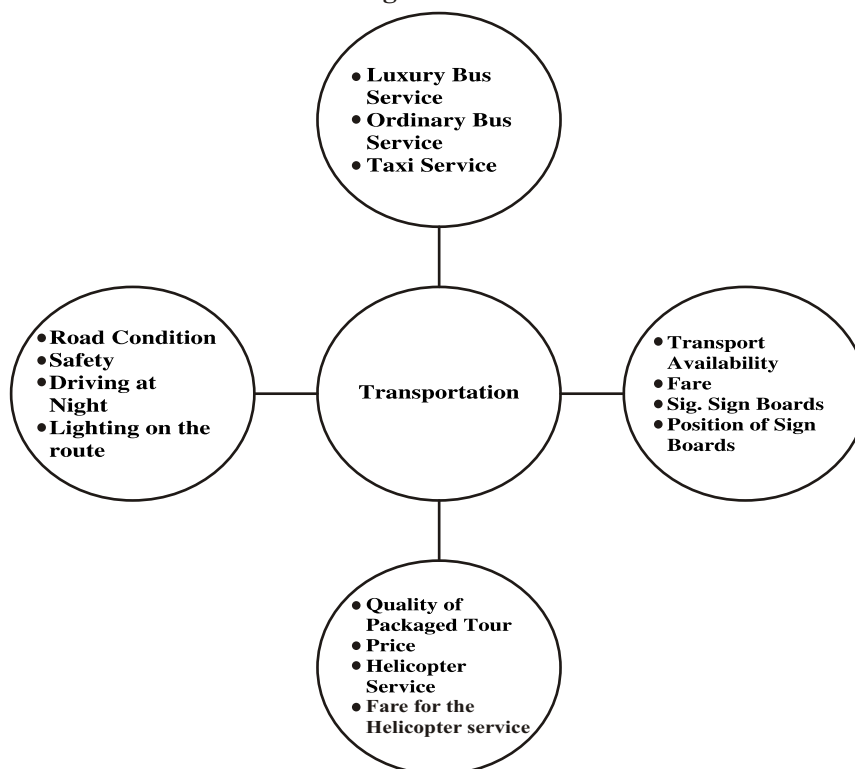
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regeneration of spirit, mental peace and quick cultural exchange. India has been the birthplace of many religions like Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism etc. leading to the devotion of Gurus, Mahatmas and Pirs visiting far of places of religious importance with great hardships. The pilgrimage destinations and religious centers ought to have facilities and aesthetic requirements which not only meet the pilgrim's religious and spiritual needs, but also keep generating a desire to visit the destination time and again with an increased average length of stay. The greatest concentration of pilgrims in any region in the world occurs in India's mountainous regions of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, with an arrival of 9.3 million pilgrims each year at Hardwar and Rishikesh. Major sites of pilgrimage (dhams) may exist in this region since the beginning of the Hindu civilization, if not before. Today, tourism accounts for nearly half of the domestic product of hill areas of Uttar Pradesh. Sixty per cent of the tourists are pilgrims, almost entirely from other parts of India. The National Action Plan for Tourism (1991) recognized the importance of pilgrim tourism and drew attention to the need for improvement of infrastructure in places of pilgrimage for a better growth of pilgrim tourism and increase in their satisfaction. The success of pilgrim destinations and shrines relies heavily on the factor whether the pilgrims are satisfied with the infrastructure and amenities provided at the place of pilgrimage. If they are satisfied, their positive word of mouth generates more potential visitors and if not, they will speak negative and shatter the image of the services offered at the destination thereby affecting its business. India being the second largest populated country in the world generates huge revenue through its pilgrimage places. Shiv Khori which is situated in District Reasi of J&K state depicts the natural formation of Shivlingum. It is one of the most venerated cave shrines of Lord Shiva in the region after the Amarnath shrine and Jawala Ji Devi (seven flames) shrine situated at Jwalamukhi in district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. It is one among the few most visited and revenue generating shrines in Himachal Pradesh. The present study has been undertaken to evaluate the problems faced by pilgrims (perceived and expected), experience with the transportation facilities while visiting the shrines and to judge the level of satisfaction of pilgrims with various services available thereby.

### SELECTING A TRAVEL DESTINATION

Selecting a travel destination is one of the crucial decisions for the traveler. A travel destination is chosen in part based upon perception of its ability to satisfy one's felt needs. It has been observed that the image of a destination is a critical factor while selecting the destination. The tourist may possess a variety of images in connection with travel. Distance and accessibility are one of the most important factors behind the choice of a travel destination.

**Figure No.: 1**



An adequate transport infrastructure has become important for the survival of any pilgrim destination, where the visitor's inflow is supposed to be much more as compared to other holiday destinations. A serious concern over better transport facility is needed so as to make the pilgrim destinations more accessible to visitors as well as the local community living all around it. An attempt has been made in this context to depict the causes and factors responsible for dissatisfaction of pilgrims with respect to transport facilities made available to them during their visit to these holy places and the same are given in Figure no. 1.

## **TOURISM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR AND HIMACHAL PRADESH**

Revival of tourism in J&K and HP has been taken up as one of the top priorities by the Government. Special packages for revival of tourism in J&K have been announced. A number of projects to give a boost to tourism in J&K have been declared at a total cost of Rs. 279.50 crore which includes setting up of 50 tourist villages, financial support to 12 tourism authorities, establishing a new tourism circuit covering-Lakhanpur-Basoli-Bani-Bhaderwah-Kishtwar-Sinthan-Srinagar. It also includes assistance for travel agents for marketing, training in tourism industry and developing skills of youths for employment and tourism industry.<sup>5</sup> Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) was incorporated on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1972 as a public limited company with an authorized capital of Rs. 2.00 crores, which rose to Rs. 15.00 crores in the year 2002. Since inception, HPTDC has been endeavoring hard for the promotion and development of tourism in the state. In the beginning, the corporation started with modest properties, however, over the years, it has diversified its product line(s) to cope up with the volatile business changes in the market. Presently, the area of operation encompasses both commercial and promotional activities. At present it provides a complete package of tourism services including accommodation, catering, transportation, tour packaging, sports and adventure activities. Today, it has the largest chain of finest hotels and restaurants in the state with nearly 57 hotels having 943 rooms and 2050 bed spread all over the state. HPTDC also runs 60 restaurants and cafes serving varied cuisine including Himachal delicacies. Government also made tourism circuits in the state in order to cover smaller destinations by interconnecting them with major destinations. The main policy behind this was to provide an overall opportunity to different destinations so that they may emerge in the world scenario which in turn resulted in the overall socio-economic development of the state.

## **DESTINATION BRIEF- SHIV KHORI SHRINE**

Famous cave shrine of "Shivkhori" situated in District Reasi of J&K state depicts the natural formation of Shivlingum. It is one of the most venerated cave shrines of Lord Shiva in the region. The Holy cave is more than 150 mts long and houses 4 feet high *Svayambhu Lingum*, which constantly bathes in a milky lime fluid dripping from the ceiling. The cave is full of natural impression and images of various *Hindu Deities* and full of divine feelings. That is why Shivkhori is known as the "*Home of Gods*". The route from Jammu to Shiv Khori is full of beautiful and picturesque mountains, waterfalls and lakes. In Udhampur district, there are many shrines such as Mata Vaishno Devi, Sudhmahadev, Pingla Mata, Mahamaya Chountra Mata, Merhada Mata, Baba Dhandar, Siad Baba. Shiv Khori is one of them located in village Ransoo of Pouni block in district Reasi, which attracts lakhs of devotees every year. Shiv Khori is situated in between the hillocks about 140 km north of Jammu, 120 km from Udhampur and 80 km from Katra. Buses and light vehicles go up to Ransoo (the base camp), which is surrounded by lush green mountains. People have to traverse a 3 km track on foot which is recently being constructed by the Shiv Khori Shrine Board, Ransoo and is duly headed by the District Development Commissioner, Udhampur as chairman and Sub Divisional Magistrate, Reasi as member. Apart from these, 30 kanals of land have been acquired to construct a bus stand. One rest house is being constructed at Shiv Khori which can accommodate an average of 5000 to 6000 pilgrims. During Shivratri, about 50,000 pilgrims visit this holy shrine in a single day. The pilgrims coming to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi can easily club their tour with Shivkhori and can make their pilgrimage complete by paying obsequence to both Shiva and Shakti. This shrine has a distinct image because of its natural beauty and it has not been fully commercialized as compared to other places where each religious activity has attained a business motive.

## **DESTINATION BRIEF- MAA JWALAJI SHRINE**

Temple of Jawala Ji Devi (seven flames) is situated in Jwalamukhi (District Kangra of Himachal Pradesh in India on NH-88). Jawala Ji is easily accessible being located on a national highway and is also accessible throughout the year as weather is pleasant. Hence, the shrine is accessible to the people of all ages throughout the year. The nearest airport at Gaggal in HP is 50 km from Jwalaji. The nearest narrow-gauge railhead is Jwalaji road Ranital at a distance of 20 km from the shrine and broad-gauge railhead is Pathankot at a distance of 120kms. Roads connect

this shrine from Delhi, Chandigarh & Dharamshala. Taxis can be hired from these places. The surrounding area is a hilly area with a beautiful scenic view all along the valley. Frequent state transport bus service is available from all important cities of Punjab, Haryana, New Delhi and J & K. The shrine is well connected by road. Frequent bus and taxi services are available. Deluxe coaches are also available at various places. The other adjoining temples to Jwalaji are Tara Devi Temple, Bhairo Temple, Ambikeshwar Temple, Teda Mandir, ArjunNanga, Shiv Temple, Radha Temple and Gorakh Dibbi, where water boils itself and a flame burns without the help of any combustible components and the flame does not get extinguished throughout the year. Apart from these ongoing activities, the temple administration also runs one Degree college and one Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya. The management of the Jwalaji temple is looked after by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Dehra, under the supervision of Deputy Development Commissioner, Kangra and was incorporated on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1987 and it comes under Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC), which was incorporated on 1<sup>st</sup> Sep. 1972 as a public limited company.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To measure the level of satisfaction of pilgrims for transport facility available during the pilgrimage to the shrine.
- To measure the level of satisfaction of pilgrims concerning the available transport during the pilgrimage to the shrine.
- To identify various problems and to suggest viable remedies to develop sustainable pilgrimage tourism.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study systematically focuses on the keenly felt problems by the pilgrims regarding the transport and transport infrastructure encountered by them during their pilgrimage to Shiv Khori Shrine, Reasi and Jwalaji Shrine, Kangra. Research is based on Primary data and is supported by Secondary data of JKTDC and HPTDC. An interview schedule with different respondents along with personal observation method was used to collect data. Sample size of 150 based on Probability Proportionate to Sampling was taken and data was collected from Ransoo, the base point to Shiv Khori Shrine, Reasi and Jwalmukhi, the base point to Jwalaji Shrine, Kangra. Further, a sample size of 150 was divided into 120 pilgrims from Jwalamukhi and 30 pilgrims from Shiv Khori to have an in depth idea about the problems faced by them so as to provide viable remedies to the problem(s).

### DATA ANALYSIS

The level of satisfaction of pilgrims regarding the transport and transport infrastructure facilities available during the pilgrimage was measured with the help of Likert Five Point Scale Technique (5-1) ranging from Highly Satisfied(5) to Highly Dissatisfied(1). Data was analyzed by using Weighted Average Mean method. Personal interview was also conducted to know the unstated issues.

Detailed of the Weighted Mean Score at Jwalaji and Shiv Khori is given below in Table 1(a) and 1(b) respectively.

S. No	Transport Services	1(A) WMS JWALAJI	1(B) WMS SHIV KHORI
1	Luxury Bus Service	0.213889	0.271111
2	Ordinary Bus Service	0.218333	0.233333
3	Taxi Service	0.217167	0.251111
4	Transport Availability	0.214417	0.264444
5	Safety of Transport Facility	0.182222	0.222222
6	Fare	0.185556	0.251111
7	Driving at Night	0.177778	0.186667
8	Helicopter Service	0.173889	0.266667
9	Fare of Helicopter Service	0.1602	0.260001
10	Quality of Tourism Package	0.198333	0.224444
11	Price of Tour Package	0.188889	0.233333
12	Road Condition	0.202867	0.20001
13	Lighting on the Route	0.181157	0.202222
14	Significant Sign Boards Installed	0.210548	0.226667
15	Position of Sign Boards	0.201434	0.206667

Most of the pilgrims were satisfied with the luxury bus service till Shiv Khori with mean score of (0.271111) and



were not much satisfied with the same facility at Jwalaji with mean score of (0.213889). In case of ordinary bus service (0.233333), pilgrims were found to be quite satisfied with the services provided at Shiv Khori and were not much satisfied at Jwalaji with mean score of (0.218333) which shows that inadequate luxury and ordinary bus service at both the places has hampered the satisfaction level of pilgrims visiting these two holy places. Pilgrims' satisfaction with taxi service at Shiv Khori and Jwalaji was (0.251111) and (0.217167) showing a more positive response towards these facilities at Shiv Khori. Mean score of (0.264444) was calculated for transport availability at Shiv Khori and (0.214417) at Jwalaji that clearly showed that pilgrims were much satisfied with availability of transport facility at Shiv Khori and few pilgrims were found to be satisfied with this facility availed during their pilgrimage to Jwalaji. Pilgrims' response towards safety of transport was very poor at Jwalaji with mean score value of (0.182222) and it was observed to be somewhat satisfactory at Shiv Khori with mean score value (0.222222). Pilgrims' response towards fare and driving at night at Jwalaji was (0.185556) and (0.177778) respectively which again showed poor response from pilgrims and as far as Shiv Khori was concerned, the responses of pilgrims regarding these facilities were (0.251111) and (0.186667). Here, it has been observed that pilgrims were satisfied with fare but were highly dissatisfied with the road conditions and other facilities enroute to Shiv Khori. While talking about the helicopter service and its fare, the responses of the respondents were calculated with mean score of (0.173889) and (0.1602) for Jwalaji and their response for the same facilities at Shiv Khori was (0.266667) and (0.2600) which mean that pilgrims were highly dissatisfied while availing the helicopter services and its fair due to irregular availability for Jwalaji but they were quite satisfied with these facilities at Shiv Khori because there is regular flight facility from Jammu to Katra which is the nearest helipad for availing air transport service to both Shri Mata Vaishno Devi and Shiv Khori. As the present scenario of tourism has depicted, with respect to packaged tours, the responses of the pilgrims were calculated for these two services viz: quality of tourism package and price paid for the tour package. The study revealed that mean score for both the services at Jwalaji was (0.19833) and (0.188889) respectively and for Shiv Khori it was (0.224444) and (0.233333) that clearly showed that pilgrims were not satisfied with these facilities at Jwalaji but were moderately satisfied with these facilities at Shiv Khori. The main reason for pilgrim's dissatisfaction at Jwalaji was due to irregular availability of transport and its connectivity with major cities within and outside the state. Pilgrims' responses towards transport infrastructure were also calculated and it revealed that these places were lacking far behind in terms of these facilities as compared to other shrines. While talking about road conditions and lighting on the route to Jwalaji, the responses of the pilgrims were (0.202867) and (0.181157) and for Shiv Khori, their responses were (0.20001) and (0.20222) respectively, which showed that pilgrims were satisfied with the condition of roads from major cities to the shrine on a moderate basis but they were found to be quite dissatisfied with lighting facilities on the route leading to the shrines. Apart from these facilities, responses of pilgrims were also calculated for number, position and installation of sign boards on the route. The studies revealed that weighted mean score for these two facilities at Jwalaji was (0.210548) and (0.201434) respectively that clearly showed the dissatisfaction of pilgrims regarding the number, position and installation of these facilities on the route. However, the responses of pilgrims for these facilities at Shiv Khori was (0.226667) and (0.206667) showing a positive response towards these facilities while visiting the shrine. The main factors behind their dissatisfaction were safety, fare, driving at night, helicopter service, packaged tour facilities and last but not the least, lighting facility on the route. The study revealed that the above stated factors contributed largely to their dissatisfaction level, especially at Jwalaji. However, their responses towards the same facilities were also calculated for Shiv Khori where road condition, lighting on the route and position of sign boards on the route were poorly ranked by the pilgrims. Also, the cause behind their dissatisfaction with the Taxi service was due to heavy fare charged by the Taxi operators. This issue has become a matter of serious discussion because there is no facility of Luxury buses for Jwalaji and Shiv Khori and only a few people avail the taxi services. The Government needs to come down heavily on the Taxi operators and should fix fares on a moderate basis by opening pre-paid taxi booths at different places so as to reduce both the over charging by taxi drivers and inconvenience faced by the pilgrims coming from outside the state. At the same time, majority of the people were found to be dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied with safety of transport and driving at night. An in depth interview was conducted by the researcher and the study revealed that rash driving, poor lighting facility enroute and insufficient sign boards were the primary reasons behind the accidents on highways. So far, no necessary arrangements have been made by the Govt. regarding lightning and installation of sign boards on roads which is the main cause behind accidents especially for the non- local pilgrims who are new to these places. Moreover, roads need to be checked properly during rainy and winter seasons because as both the shrines are located on hills, therefore, landslides and fog have

become the prime reason for accidents in these two seasons.

## **FINDINGS**

1. The above analysis revealed that the pilgrim tourists to Shiv Khori and Jwalaji have been facing many problems regarding transport and transport infrastructure facilities during their pilgrimage to these Holy Shrines.
2. It has been observed that after the incorporation of a separate governing body for the shrines, flow of pilgrims to Shiv Khori and Jwalaji increased substantially during the past decade (as compared to previous decades). But concrete steps have not been taken for the development of a better transport infrastructure, which has consequently resulted in lesser popularity of these shrines among non- local pilgrims. The poor infrastructure has led to a decline in the number of pilgrims visiting these shrines and hence, these shrines have not contributed much towards the state's economy.
3. The study found that pilgrims are not much satisfied with some of the basic facilities like road conditions, their maintenance, lighting on the road, driving at night and installation of significant sign boards on the route.
4. The study also revealed that pilgrims were not satisfied with the sanitation facilities; especially for their movement from base camp to holy shrines.
5. The study revealed there is no facility of close circuit cameras (except in some special places) at these shrines.
6. Digital Display Boards giving exact information about scheduled arrival and departure of buses and trains were not properly installed at major crowd generating areas like bus stands, railway station and major DHQ.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

1. It is recommended to Shiv Khori Shrine Board and HPTDC to go for joint venture with BRO for the development of road from major DHQ to these shrines.
2. It is advisable for the municipality and local governing body to properly manage the roads coming under the town area committee.
3. Shrine Board and Temple Administration may outsource basic facilities like installation of sign boards, their maintenance along with regular check-up of roads to private players especially during rainy and winter seasons so as to maintain the sanctity of the holy places.
4. The Tourism Department along with the Shrine Board is required to make Religious Tourist Circuits by adjoining Jwalaji and Shiv Khori with smaller destinations situated in and around these shrines by providing packaged tour facility to pilgrims coming to these holy places.
5. Tourism industry in (J&K) and (HP) can also focus on small temples and religious places located in far off rural areas under one circuit by providing adequate transport infrastructures that will help the Tourism Department to attract first time visitors to visit these places which will provide better income, employment opportunities and revenue to the people of these areas.
6. Now-a- days, pollution has become a matter of serious discussion, therefore, it is suggested that CNG bus facility should be provided.
7. Keeping in view the tremendous growth in number of pilgrims to these Holy places during past decade, it is necessary to start "Computerized Wrist Band" facility and "Online Booking Facility" so as to minimize huge waiting queues and traffic jams at shrines.
8. Keeping in mind the yearly growth in number of pilgrims to these Holy places and their remote locations, it has become important to install close circuit cameras along the track so as to keep vigil on the floating population.
9. Digital Display Boards giving exact information about the pilgrimage are needed to be installed especially during Shivratri and Navratras at major crowd generating places like bus stand, Railway station and major DHQ.

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