

A Regional Geographical Perspectives of Buddhist Tourism Scenario in India and Surrounding Countries

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ABSTRACT:

Buddhism, one of the major religions of the world, finds its roots in Northeastern India. Siddhârtha Gautama or Buddha's teaching laid the founding stone for new line of thinking called Buddhism. Born in the Himalayan foothills, Siddhartha left his palace to live the life of a mendicant at the age of 29. Buddha travelled to Sarnath (Isipathana), where he delivered his first sermon - Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. Dharmekha Stupa at Mrigadava or Deer Park in Sarnath is believed to be the spot where the sermon was given. The archaeological museum near the site has a rich collection of Buddhist Relics and antiques. Buddha established his first disciples (sangha) here to promote his new doctrine.

Buddhism binds the cultures of India and its neighboring countries like Butan, China, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam. About 488 million, Buddhists worldwide represent 7 percent of the world's total population, making the Buddhists the fourth largest community in the world. The peace and harmony spread by the Buddhism and Buddhist places in the world. This paper presented the worldwide impact of Buddhist tourist places aboard India.

Keywords: Buddhism, Tour, Sangha, Stupa

INTRODUCTION:

Buddha wandered through the modern-day States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in India. His footsteps covered nearly a 1000km stretch from Kajangla in the East to Mathura in the West. The Tripitaka, ancient Buddhist scriptures provides us with an insight of the Buddha's journey. After many years of meditation, Buddha attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. The temple complex in Gaya, Bihar is the most important pilgrim site associated with the life of Buddha. In 2002 it was also declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Buddha is believed to have travelled to Rajagaha, Nalanda, Patna, Urvella and Lativanna. Monasteries identified by archeologist include Ghositarama, Jivakarama, Jetavana and Veluvana. Buddha visited Nalanda several times during the course of his life, and excavations reveal several temples and vihara ruins at the site. Many famous Buddhist scholars had studied or taught at Nalanda, and seeds of religious forms such as Mahâyâna Buddhism were laid here. Kushinagar, in modern day eastern Uttar Pradesh is believed to be the final resting place of Lord Buddha. He delivered his last sermon here and the place is venerated as the site of Buddha's Mahaparinirvana (freedom from the cycle of birth and death). He was cremated at the Ramabhar Stupa.

The mortal remains of Buddha were preserved in eight commemorative chortens, and then further distributed by King Ashoka into 84,000 Stupas across his kingdom and beyond. Since Buddha's journey covered a wide area of the Gangetic plain and was later spread to

Southeast Asia through his disciples, Buddhism encompasses diverse and vibrant practices and traditions.

OBJECTIVES:

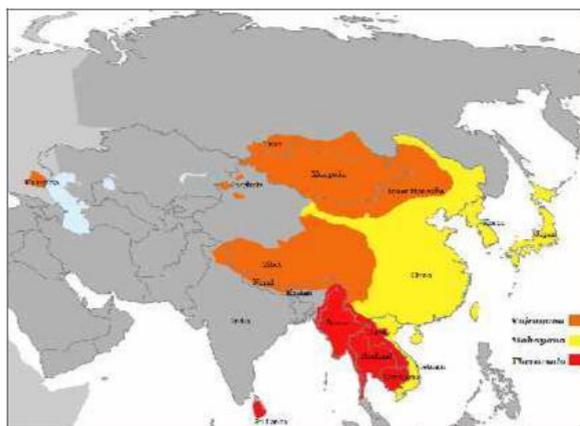
1. To highlights the Buddhist Tourist Places in aboard India.
2. To understand the impact of Buddhist Tourism on tourism development.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:

Present paper based on the secondary database which is available in various books, Journals and websites regarding the tourism development through Buddhist tourism.

INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF BUDDHIST TOURISM:

Buddhism has now been established across almost every continent. About 488 million Buddhists worldwide represent 7% of the world's total population, making Buddhism the 4th largest religion in the world¹. Buddhism has evolved into three major branches: Mahayana, Theravada and Vajrayana. Despite of regional variations and different schools of thinking, Buddhism has retained its unique identity.



Map: Buddhist Tourism developed centers from out of India (Ref. www.edgeofindia.com)

Buddha's disciples spread Buddhism beyond the borders of India to Southeast Asia, where these ideas have played a major role in shaping culture and traditions. The map shows various regions of Southeast Asia and their affiliation with particular branches. Mahayana, the most widely accepted form, is concentrated in China, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism, the second-largest branch, is concentrated in countries such as Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, Laos and Cambodia. Vajrayana, Buddhism, the smallest of the three major branches, is concentrated in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Mongolia.

CHINA:

Indian monks travelled north through the silk route to teach Buddhism. It was at its peak during the Sui Dynasty (589-617 CE) and Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE). Temples and traditional religions were denigrated and smashed during the rise of Cultural Revolution in 1966. Over the last few decades, local authorities in China encourage projects undertaken for development and restoration of Buddhist temples boosting the tourism industry. These temples attract many believers spurring the local economy. Jing'an Temple, Shanghai was converted into a plastic factory during the Cultural Revolution. Municipal Government's worked on rebuilding and enlarging the Jing'an Temple, completing renovation in 2010. Development of planned commercial district and pedestrian street alongside the Temple.

Initiatives undertaken by the Government:

- Rebuilding Buddhist Sites
- Exploiting the tourist potential of existing monasteries
- Organizing celebrations and tourism festivals around great temples
- Religious institutions, monasteries and the State are committed to a relationship of cooperation towards developing tourism.

THAILAND:

Theravada is believed to be the first form of Buddhism to be introduced in Thailand around the 3rd century B.C. Since then Buddhism in its various forms: Mahayana, Burma (pagan), Ceylon (Landkavamsa) have influenced cultural practice in Thailand. Named as 'The Land of Yellow Robes', Buddhism is the main religion followed in Thailand.

Thailand is dotted with several Buddhist temples and world heritage sites along with rich natural heritage which draws tourists from around the world. A secular Government ministry supervises Buddhist temples and monks Buddhist institutions and clergy are being granted special benefits by the Government, as well as being subjected to a certain amount of Government oversight.

BHUTAN:

Buddhism has a major foothold in Bhutan. Tantric Mahayan practiced in Bhutan was established by Guru Rinpoche in the eight century. He established the dual system of religion and secular Government, building the system of dzongs. Vajrayana Buddhism is the state religion of Bhutan.

Initiatives undertaken by the Government:

- Religion has long been supported financially by the Government through annual subsidies to Buddhist monastery, shrines, monks, and nuns.
- Construction of numerous chorten (stupas) throughout the country was supported by the Government

- Originally a Government agency, Bhutan Tourism Corporation Limited (BTCL) was privatized in 1991. The company along with promoting tourism works towards protection of cultural heritage and environment

INDONESIA:

Indonesia has the world's largest Buddhist Temple, Borobudur in Central Java, which was built in the 9th century.

- A master plan to restore Borobudur was evolved
- Along with UNESCO, major restoration of the site was undertaken. It was declared as a UNESCO heritage site in 1991
- The Government has successfully organized Borobudur International 10K, a festival that is a unique combination of tourism and sports. The competition has three main categories, which are - the General Category (international professional athletes, national athletes, international and national runners), the Local Category (citizens of Central Java and Yogyakarta), and Students Category. This has helped attract athletes and tourists from across the world.

INDIA:

Buddhism emerged in the ancient Kingdom of Magadha, which is currently in Bihar, India and based on Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) teaching. Buddhism spread outside of Magadha beginning in the Buddha's Lifetime.

Now in India there being three main holy sites of Buddhism 1. Bodh Gaya, (Bihar), 2. Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh), 3. Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh) . These are the main centers for development of Buddhist tourist places in India. For the development of above centers and regarding other Buddhist tourist places, Govt. of India announced and sanctioned Rs. 361.97 Crore under the 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme for development of Buddhist Circuits in India.

In the Mahaparinirvana Suta, the Buddha tells his followers that they can attain merit and noble rebirth by going on pilgrimage to the places where he was born (Lumbini), gained enlightenment (Bodhgaya), first taught (Sarnath), and attained Nirvana (Kushinagar). The Buddhist tourist train take you to these places and helps you experience firsthand the self-disciplined and legendary life of Lord Buddha.

India, the country where Buddhism originated has rich memories of the Buddhist legacy. As part of its drive towards austerity, the only kind of art and architecture that it supported were Stupas (stone cased moulds that commemorated relics of Buddha), Chaityas (prayer halls), and Viharas (cells for the monks).

The potential is really huge and is a great opportunity for India to capitalize on this right away. The world over, Buddhism has gained a lot of popularity including India, and in our own continent, there is enough potential waiting to be capitalized.

CONCLUSION:

Buddhism is also gaining momentum in the West, across America and Europe. It is one of the largest religions in the United States. Socially engaged Buddhism has developed in the U.S, which applies Buddhist values to larger social problems, including war and environmental concerns. The Government has demonstrated a strong focus in the sector through significant budget allocations such as INR 500 crore for developing five tourist circuits. In India the Ministry of Tourism has launched a comprehensive plan - Integrated Tourism Development of the Buddhist Circuit in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar - which will further boost infrastructure development, skill development, increased market access and involvement of communities.

Buddhism binds the cultures of India and its neighboring countries like Bhutan, Cina, Combodia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. But we will promote our heritage, the Buddhist Circuit will indeed be the focus. However, we need to improve our infrastructure and we will start with Samath.

The regional perspectives are the most effective base of the developed Buddhist tourist places in India and surrounding region. This regionalism is developed to the thoughts of the lord Buddha.

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