

**POTENTIALITY AND CHALLENGES OF WEST BENGAL-AS A CULTURAL
HERITAGE TOURIST DESTINATION**

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Abstract:

Purpose: The main motive of the study is to explore the cultural heritage tourism potentiality and challenges in West Bengal, India. Tourism industry is rising very fast throughout the world. Cultural heritage tourism is highlight to art, architecture, history, religious heritage, food habits, monuments and life style of a particular region. West Bengal is the state of India that is gifted with all tourism ingredients to address different types of tourism. The state is blessed with a rich cultural heritage. Unfortunately the cultural tourism market of West Bengal is still a backbencher. The main intention of the researcher is to investigate the challenges behind deficient in expansion of cultural heritage tourism in Bengal.

Methodology/ Design: The methodology is mainly based on the literature review. Secondary data has been taken from previous research work and collected from books and internet sources.

Research Objectives: The main objective of this paper is to focus on the potentiality of cultural heritage tourism in West Bengal and also evaluates the different challenges to make it more sustainable. The role of every stake holders should be evaluated and to provide some recommendation for sustainability of cultural heritage tourism in Bengal.

Research limitations: As the present research is mainly based on the secondary data, therefore practical judgment regarding the potentiality and challenges faced by the stakeholders of cultural heritage tourism is missing.

Practical Implementations: The findings of this study will be helpful to understand the potentiality of West Bengal as a hub of cultural heritage tourism. It also helps to identify the

challenges faced by every stakeholder to promote the cultural heritage tourism and provide some possible resolution for sustainability of cultural tourism in Bengal.

Keywords: cultural heritage tourism, tourism potentiality, stakeholders, sustainability.

Introduction:

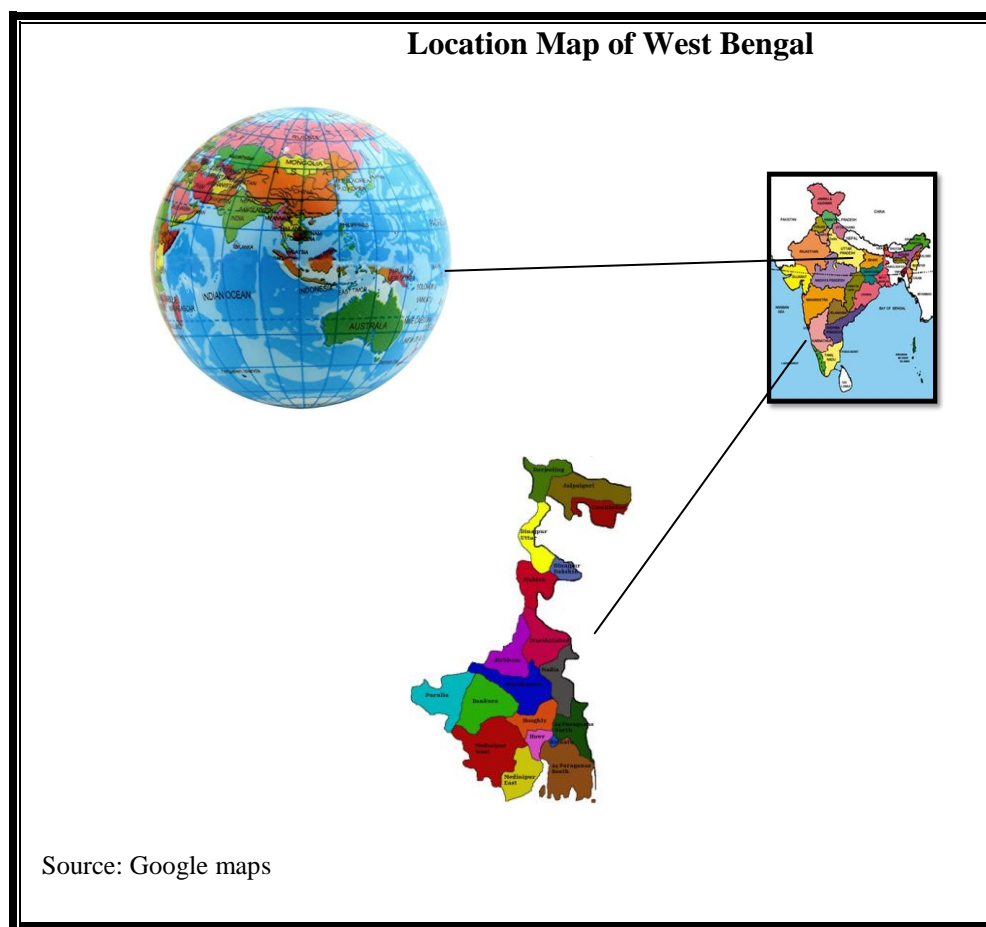
Tourism industry is rising in world's market rapidly. Internationally in last two decades tourism has become largest hospitality industry in terms of gross revenue as well as foreign exchange earnings. Tourism is a source of ancillary trade and industry, therefore development of this sector can lead to the overall development of economy. As it is a fastest growing industry the sustainability of tourism sector is very important for the economic development of any country. Tourism has major contribution in economic boost, sustainable development and social wellbeing. Therefore from the last decades it is the major area to be addressed for wide use of tourist destinations and optimum financial aids for tourist infrastructure developments. West Bengal is the state of India that is gifted with all tourism ingredients to address different types of tourism. West Bengal is considered as a cultural capital of India. It has vast physical and cultural diversities which can draw a large number of tourists. The state is blessed with Himalaya in the north to Bay of Bengal to south and delta region of Sunderban, lush green forest, various monuments and cultural festival. The state is having the unbounded natural diversities and famous for cultural heritage. Unfortunately in the context of tourism market West Bengal is still a backbencher in compare with other Indian states.

Cultural heritage tourism is highlight to art, architecture, history, religious heritage, food habits, monuments and life style of a particular region. The cultural heritage tourism is important types of Indian tourism sector. The India with glorious past and prosperous cultural heritage is a magnet for domestic and foreign tourists. As West Bengal is a cultural hub of India, the potentiality of cultural tourism is also elevated. This research paper is an attempt to evaluate the potentiality and challenges to magnetize the cultural heritage tourism in West Bengal.

Location and Background of Study Area:

The geographical extension of west Bengal is lies between 21° 55' North to 26° 50" north and 86° 30' east longitude to 89° 58' long. The states of West Bengal are comprised with 19 districts. It

has an area of 88,752 km² it borders Bangladesh in the east, and Nepal and Bhutan in the north. It also borders the Indian states of Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Sikkim, and Assam. The state capital is Kolkata (Calcutta), and West Bengal stand in seventh position in size in India. According to 2011 census West Bengal population is 91,347,736 which contribute 7.55% of country's population. West Bengal has widest ranges of tourist destination. In north snow clad Himalaya in Darjeeling, known as “Queen of hills station” in India, unbounded tea gardens and tropical forest and in south famous Royal Bengal Tigers of Sunderban. Besides all the state is one of the most enriched cultural and ethnic diversity in country. The state is celebrating many cultural festivals almost throughout the year like Durga puja, Poush mela, Kolkata book fair, Kolkata international film festival, Ganga sagar mela, Jagadharti puja and many others.



Objectives:

The main objectives of this research are:

- To outspread the prosperity of cultural heritage potentiality of West Bengal.
- To investigate the challenges faced by stakeholders to explore the cultural tourism.
- To provide some rational recommendations for sustainability of cultural heritage tourism in West Bengal.

Methodology:

The methodology is mainly based on the literature review. Secondary data has been taken from previous research work and collected from books and internet sources.

West Bengal as favored Cultural heritage Tourism Destination:

Travel and tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner for India. In 2018 foreign tourist arrival (FTAs) increased 5.20 percent. The Government of India has set a target of 20 million foreign tourist arrival FTAs by 2020 and double the foreign exchange earnings as well (Ministry of Tourism). The state West Bengal stands in sixth position in terms of foreign tourist visits. The West Bengal Tourism policies of 2016 were emphasis on sustainable development of society, environmental and economy and stress on increase the share of domestic and international tourist. Different project investment opportunities have given but cultural heritage tourism was not highlighted. State has increase the tourist flow from 5.2 million to 81.2 million in a time span of 2001 to 2017. The foreign tourist visits also increase from 1.24 million to 1.57 million from 2013 to 2017. In 2016 state attract 6.2% foreign tourist of the country, and declared that Durga puja should be promoted as greatest public festival of the World, source: Tourism policy of West Bengal 2019.

The Darjeeling Himalaya Railway popularly known as toy train and Sundarban largest estuarine mangrove tiger reserve forest designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. **Durga puja** is eminent cultural festival of the state. Durga puja is portrait esteem Bengal culture in all respect. The festival is celebrating the victory of ten-armed goddess Durga over buffalo devil Mahishashur and stated the victory of good over evil. Present Government taken some initiative to attract foreign tourist to soak the flavor of Durga puja. As the state will provide some passes for foreign visitors to make their pandal hopping hazard free. They also get special bhog (the food offer to goddess cooked in a traditional Bengali recipe) during their visit to Durga puja. Durga puja pandal symbolize the Bengal culture. Kolkata alone celebrate more than 1000 puja. Every

year they compete to each other with innovative ideas. Generally north Kolkata pandals are much traditional and south Kolkata are contemporary. **Poush mela** depicts the prototypical Bengal culture held at Shantiniketan in Birbhum district. Shantiniketan itself is a blend of culture as nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore established Visva Bharati here and its cultural aroma attract 1.2 million tourists every year. Poush mela held at the Bengali month of Poush. The main magnetism of the mela is Bengali folk music such as baul, kirtan and kobigan and besides this local handicraft and fabrics is available. According to government statistics nearly 40,000 tourist visits the mela. The **Gangasagar Mela** is Hindu religious festival and it is probably the state's largest fair. Pilgrims from every corner of the country arrive to take bath at the confluence of Ganga River with sea. It is one of the main income generating activities for local people. The **Kolkata Book fair** is World largest non-trade book fair. Over 2.5 million people attended book fair every year. Every year International film festival was celebrated at Kolkata. In 2019 Kolkata International Film Festival was celebrated their 25th year and 366 film were screened from 76 countries.

Table No: Travel Trade Service Provider in some selected States and UT, During 2018

State	Adventure tour operator	Domestic Tour operator	Inbound Tour operator	Tourist transport operator	Travel agent
Maharashtra	4	6	24	8	38
New Delhi	22	46	253	63	59
Kerala	1	8	24	7	17
West Bengal	6	20	9	4	11

Source: Indian Tourism statistics 2019

The above table shows the travel trade service provider of four Indian states. West Bengal tourism need to work more as numbers of tour operators are much less in compare to Delhi. Inbound tour operators are only 9 and New Delhi is 253. Hence, West Bengal is blessed with cultural festival but most of them are not organized. As during Durga puja Kolkata city is flooded with local visitors with high scale of environment pollution. Darjeeling Himalayan railway is also facing dispute to run efficiently due political unrest.

Recommendations:

Festivals always portray the culture of any region and also help to promote the tourism activities. The state West Bengal is rich with culture. Many festivals are taking place with affluent cultural varieties but cultural tourism not yet very developed. As local people those have high potential cultural ethics are not responsive or aware about their cultural richness. Therefore stakeholders should take initiatives to increase the local interest to promote the cultural heritage tourism. Some famous cultural festivals need more infrastructural developments to attract more tourists. West Bengal should focus on cultural tourism marketing, social media to be used for community formation to promote Bengal culture. If employment generation through tourism is main concern of the state it should develop more tourism research institute and every stakeholder should be developed their skilled. The every policy maker should consider and promote culture of Bengal as a part of every policy.

Conclusion:

The cultural heritage tourism is expected to become key factors for sustainable human development. It picks up the growth of local economy, employment generation, and infrastructural development of local remote area. The state West Bengal has high potentiality in the field of cultural heritage tourism but not exposed to the outer world. Although state require to look for better development with efficient policy. The government, Ministry of tourism as well as each stakeholder associated to Bengal culture comes together in providing the flavor of Bengal cultural heritage to the world.

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