

An Assessment of Tourism Structure and Superstructure in Buddhist Pilgrimage Circuit of Bihar

Dr. S. Fazal D. Firdausi^{1*} Dr. Anshu²

¹ Assistant Professor (Geography), Competitive Examinations Centre, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune

² Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, Delhi

Abstract – Circuit Tourism is a multi-centre, multi-destination travel arrangement. Circuit tourism involves visits to more than one destination during a trip away from home. Bihar is one of the oldest inhabited places in the World with history of thousands of years. The rich culture and heritage of the Bihar is evident from the innumerable monuments, temples and shrines dotted all over the state. Bihar is also trying to promote tourism by developing cluster of tourist centres, also called as circuits. It is making efforts to make religious and pilgrimage tourism destinations more attractive, with suitable tour packages and facilities. However, the plan to promote pilgrimage circuits has been marred by diverse range of problems. The paper aims to identify the Buddhist pilgrimage tourism circuit of Bihar. It also intends to examine the level of backward and forward linkages in the development and functioning of Buddhist pilgrimage tourism circuit in the state. It aims to bring forth the major bottlenecks in the successful implementation of Buddhist circuit tourism model in Bihar. Finally, it explores the opportunities and potential to strengthen and streamline Buddhist pilgrimage tourism circuit at the state level. The study is largely interpretative in nature and mostly based on the interpretation and analysis of secondary data, using mixed research methodologies.

Key Words – Circuit Tourism, Buddhism, Pilgrimage, Forward Linkages, Backward Linkages

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1. TOURISM CIRCUITS OF BIHAR

The state of Bihar, following the National Tourism Policy guidelines is also trying to develop and promote tourism by developing cluster of tourist centres also known as tourism circuit. In the Bihar Tourism Policy of 2009, Bihar Government clearly advocates developing tourism circuit based on various themes. It states that religious circuits for the Buddha, Jain, Sikh, Islam religions to be developed with special work plan to promote religious tourism making the religious circuits attractive with suitable tour packages and facilities. Hindu, Buddha, Jain, Ramayana, Sufi, Gandhi and eco-tourism have to find profound expression in development of tourist sites and spots.¹

The tourism circuits which have been identified by the state government are as follows:²

1. Buddhist Circuit

1 Bihar tourism policy 2009,

<http://www.tourismbihar.org/dot/tourismpolicy.php>

2 <http://www.tourismbihar.org/tourist-destinations/buddhistcircuit.php>

2. Jain Circuit

3. Ramayana Circuit

4. Gandhi Circuit

5. Ecotourism Circuit

2. ASSESSMENT OF BUDDHIST PILGRIMAGE CIRCUIT

Buddhism flourished in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, in the Kingdom of Magadha and Kosala. Buddha spent most of his time in Bihar and after his death three councils were held successively at Rajgriha, Vaishali and Patliputra. The term 'Bihar' derives from the Sanskrit word 'Vihara', which means abode and itself explains the relation of Bihar with the Viharas, used as the Buddhist abode.

On the basis of network linkages that is connectivity through road and railways, two Buddhist circuit may be identified in the State of Bihar. One major circuit includes all the major

destinations associated with Gautam Buddha and his life. The other circuit is a minor one, including destinations associated with the disciples and followers of Buddha and Buddhism, with remnants of the past like Pillars, Stupas and Vihars.

2.1 Bodh Gaya-Rajgir-Nalanda-Vikramshila

2.1.1: Bodh Gaya

Located on the bank of Niranjana River, it is the part of Gaya district of Bihar. Major attractions of Bodh Gaya are:

- i. Mahabodhi Temple Complex
- ii. The Bodhi Tree
- iii. Mucalinda Lake
- iv. Great Buddha Statue
- v. Sujata Stupa
- vi. Modern Monasteries
- vii. Bodh Gaya Archeological Museum

Bodh Gaya is well connected with Gaya and other cities of Bihar through National Highway-83 and Grand Trunk Road to Dobhi. The road between Gaya and Bodh Gaya is in excellent condition. Bodh Gaya can be easily reached through auto-rickshaw, which runs on shared basis, private buses, tourist taxis and private vehicles which are easily available from Gaya town. The nearest railhead is Gaya, located (16 Km) from the place. Gaya is very well connected with New Delhi through the network of Indian Railways. Currently, around seven express trains, one mail and three Rajdhani express, either has a stoppage at Gaya Junction or originates from the station itself. Gaya airport has been given status of an international airport, specially opened to cater to tourists coming from Buddhist majority regions of South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia for their pilgrimage.

Bodh Gaya has abundance of Hotels, Lodges, Dharmashala and society run guest houses. The amenities and facilities provided in the hotels across Bodh Gaya is world class. Presently, there are around four hotels in Gaya, which can be conveniently put under the category of Star rated hotel. Different nations have their monasteries and Viharas, all these Viharas have guest houses for the citizens of the respective countries. There are around five guest houses and hotels situated in Bodh Gaya which are managed by the Government of Bihar like SidhartaVihar, Buddha Vihar, Niranjana resort etc. At the Mahabodhi temple complex, public utility services are available, unlike other places of tourist interest, which are located in the state of Bihar. Toilets are

relatively in order and clean. There is an efficient and reliable shoe deposit centre, where one can put their shoes before entering into the temple complex. The PHC (Health Centre) of Bodh Gaya is in good condition, providing basic health facilities to the people as well as the tourists. Other areas of Bodh Gaya lack basic public utilities like toilets and drinking water facilities. The tourists (domestic and foreign) are dependent on the bottled drinking water.

2.1.2: Rajgir

Rajgir is a city (notified area) and a block under the Nalanda district of Bihar. The city is surrounded by seven hills - Vibhara, Ratna, Saila, Sona, Udaya, Chhatha and Vipula. Major attractions of Rajgir are:

- i. Venuvana
- ii. Karanda Tank
- iii. Pipala Stone House
- iv. Saptaparni Caves
- v. Gridhrakuta Hill or Vultures Peak
- vi. World Peace Pagoda (Ratnagiri Hill)
- vii. Amravana or Jivaka's Mango Garden

Rajgir is connected with Patna via Bhakhtiyarpur through rail and road. There are number of private and government managed hotels in Rajgir. Hotels which can be put in the star category like Bihar State Tourism Development corporation run TathagatVihar and other privately owned hotels like Hotel Centaur Hokke, Hotel Ashok and Rajgir Residency. All these hotels provide good quality accommodation, food and other facilities required by the tourists. Public utility services are offered at two locations - at the base of world peace pagoda and Tadopa hot springs. It has four operational bank branches of State Bank of India, Central Bank of India, Nalanda Cooperative Bank and Madhya Bihar cooperative bank. Public transport is dependent on the 'Tongas' or the horse cart and the auto rickshaws.

2.1.3: Nalanda

Nalanda block where the archaeological ruins of famous Nalanda University is situated in the district Nalanda of Bihar. Established in the fifth century B.C, Nalanda is recorded as the world's earliest university. Major attractions of Nalanda are:

- i. Nalanda Ruins
- ii. The Archaeological Museum

- iii. Xiang Hseng Memorial
- iv. Nalanda Multimedia Museum

Nalanda is connected to Silao and Bihar Sharif through National Highway No. 82. Nalanda can be reached by buses run by Bihar State Road Transport Corporation and private operators. One can also take auto Rickshaw on shared basis to reach Nalanda from Rajgir. Nalanda has a small market, tourists bungalows are few and are government owned. There are a few guest houses, managed by various societies. But majority of tourists prefer to stay at Rajgir for better facilities. There is one toilet near the ASI museum and Nalanda University ruins which is clean and maintained, otherwise the city and other places lack basic public utility services.

2.1.4: Vikramshila

The remains of the ancient university have been partially excavated at village Antichak in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar and the process is still underway.

- i. Vikramshila Monastery Ruins
- ii. Vikramshila Archaeological Museum

Vikramshila is connected to Kahalgaon and Bhagalpur through a National Highway and State Highway No. 31. The nearest major town near Vikramshila is Kahalgaon. There is no public transport available to reach Vikramshila directly. The tourists have to hire private vehicles or taxis to visit the site. The road leading to Vikramshila Monastery ruins is in very poor condition and it is hard to imagine that the road will ultimately reach a place, so historical, splendid and beautiful. There is complete absence of hotels and restaurants at the Vikramshila Monastery ruins site. Private hotels and Dharmashala are located in Kahalgaon on moderate charges but they are not suitable for foreign tourists. There is complete absence of public utility services at Vikramshila Monastery ruins. There are no toilets, people have to use open spaces in and around the monastery. There are no shops near the monastery which sells medicines or other daily necessities usually required by the tourists. Public transport is not visible. Tourism Department, Government of Bihar is making efforts to develop signage to facilitate tourist movement in and around Vikramshila monastery from Kahalgaon.

2.2 Vaishali-Kesariya-Lauriya

2.2.1: Vaishali

Vaishali, is an ancient city located in Vaishali district of Bihar. Major attractions of Vaishali are:

- i. The Garh of Raja Vishal

- ii. Suttari Buddhist Stupa
- iii. Ashokan Pillar
- iv. The Stupa and the Buddha Idol
- v. Manky Tank (Markathad, Ramkund)
- vi. World Peace Pagoda (Vishwa Shanti Stupa)
- vii. Archaeological Museum Vaishali

Vaishali, the ancient city is connected to cities of Motihari, Muzaffarpur and Hajipur through National Highway No. 102 and 74 and state highways. The roads are in very good condition. There are direct buses run by BSTC and private operators to Vaishali from Patna, Muzaffarpur and Motihari. There are very few hotels in Vaishali because most of the tourists (domestic and foreign) they prefer to stay at Patna. There are few society owned Dharmashalas or guest houses for people from Buddhist community belonging to different nations like Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Laos. Like most of the tourist spots in Bihar this place also lack public utility services.

2.2.2: Kesariya, Purbi Champaran

Kesariya is a small town located in Purbi Champaran. It is the site of (possibly) the biggest Stupa of India. The Stupa is located 54 Kilometres from Motihari. There is an absolute absence of public utility services at this particular destination. A tourist has to travel at least 15 Kilometres to get bottled drinking water.

2.2.3: Lauriya Nandargarh, Paschimi Champaran

Lauriya Nandargarh is situated in the Bettiah district of Bihar. The major attractions of Lauriya are:

- i. Ashoka Pillar
- ii. Nandargarh Mound

It lies on the state highway connecting Bettiah and Ramnagar. There are few hotels available at Lauriya but tourists can stay at private hotels, Dharmashala and government guest houses available at Bettiah or Motihari. There is an absolute absence of public utility services at this particular destination. Lauriya is developing into a good industrial town due to the presence of sugarcane based distillery and HPCL oil storage centre. Tourists can get their necessary items from the market at Lauriya.

3. PROBLEMS OF PILGRIMAGE CIRCUIT TOURISM IN BIHAR

3.1 Infrastructure

Tourist infrastructure mainly comprises of transport, water supply, power supply, health and education. The superstructure includes accommodation, recreation and entertainment infrastructure. The condition of roads within the towns reflects neglect and poor maintenance all over the state. An inimical problem faced by tourists is the presence of railway crossings at the major national and state highways; as a result people have to face long hours of traffic jams that hamper the overall touristic experience.

3.2 Power Scarcity

Scarcity of power is the key cause of concern for the government as well as the tourism industry. The tourist experience of mass tourists largely depends on the quality of services provided to them and these services are directly dependent on the availability of power. Bihar faces a daily power shortage of 295 MUs, as requirement of power in the state is calculated at 1159 MUs against availability of 864 MUs. The power shortage is so acute that few of the district headquarters have only 1-2 hours of power supply per day. The situation has several times taken violent shape, for instance it sparked protest in Lakhisarai and Bihita, where local people held workers of BSEB (Bihar State Electricity Board) hostage for hours, assaulting them and ransacking the offices of the power utility. Capital Patna is an exception but most small cities and district HQ are badly affected by power shortages. The power shortage is hampering the tourism industry; people have to resort to alternate sources like power generators which make the running cost higher, directly affecting the cost of goods and services.

3.3 Lack of Organised Public Transport

There are government and private run buses, connecting one destination of tourism circuit to another but it is not efficient, in comparison to the transport system of other states. There is lack of transport information system for the tourists at the bus terminals. It is almost impossible for a foreign tourist to take public transport and visit places situated in different parts of the state, the dependency on private tour operators is very high. Due to fixed travel itineraries the tourists fail to explore Bihar to the fullest. The intra-city public transport is moderately efficient, people use auto-rickshaw, jeep, taxis and cycle rickshaw to travel within the town. Although, these sources are convenient and affordable but most of the time it carries people much above its capacity. The vehicles are very old. They do not adhere to any pollution control norms and contributing a lot in traffic congestion, noise and air pollution.

3.4 Lack in quality Superstructure

It may also be concluded that the most developed tourism circuit of the state is Buddhist circuit. It is attracting a lot of foreign and domestic tourists every year and the number of arrivals is steadily increasing. In terms of superstructure, the condition of Buddhist circuit is relatively good in comparison to the others. Bodhgaya and Rajgir together account for the maximum proportion of accommodation units on the Buddhist circuit. Substantial number of monasteries is present in key destinations of Bihar such as Bodhgaya and Rajgir. The other locations of Buddhist circuit of Bihar like Lauriya and Kesariya lack the basic superstructure facilities. Jain circuit also attracts number of tourists every year but it lacks proper connectivity, superstructure as well as basic tourism infrastructure. For example, Pawapuri, which has substantial tourist traffic in the peak season, has only Dharmashala to cater to the needs of tourists. Jain tourist centres like Lacchuar attract a lot of NRI (Non-resident Indian) tourists from North America and the Europe but it does not have the adequate facilities to offer them. There are huge number of foreign tourists who want to visit different pilgrimage circuit but are not able to do so due to lack of tourist facilities and development.

3.5 Lack of Trained Staff

The number of other workers is high in the state. Apparently, there is no shortage of people to work in the tourism industry. All the workers who are presently engaged in the tourism industry do not have any formal training. Similarly, tourist guides are present in all the major destinations of Bihar but they are not properly trained. The trained guides are not interested to entertain the domestic tourists as they get more money from the foreigners than the domestic tourists.

3.6 Security Related Issues

According to the Union Home Ministry report, left wing extremism related fatalities declined from 171 in 2004 to 96 in 2005 and further 45 in 2006 but still 30 out of 38 districts of Bihar have been affected by Maoist activities. Nine of these districts—Patna, Gaya, Aurangabad, Jehanabad, Arwal, Kaimur, Rohtas, Nawada and Jamui are designated as 'hyper-sensitive'. A further nine districts, including Bhojpur, Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Motihari, Darbhanga, Saharsa, Banka, Sheohar fall into sensitive category. The remaining 12 districts are categorised as 'less sensitive'. The most significant thing in this regard is that the district which have been declared as 'hyper sensitive' consist the highest number of prominent tourist destinations.

3.7 Lack of Inter-agency co-ordination

There is lack of coordination among various government agencies that is resulting into failures of plans for the development of tourism. There is an absence of integrated planning of tourism to achieve inclusive growth.

3.8 Problems related to Marketing and Image building

Since, the last two decades, tourism in Bihar has been badly affected by the negative campaigning, which has tarnished its image as a secure and safe tourist destination. The marketing strategy of Bihar tourism is also not effective in comparison to the states of Goa and Kerala. Bihar even lies behind Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in aggressive media campaigning and creating awareness among people through different means, portraying real picture of Bihar to the real world. The circuits that have been identified by the state government are marred by few fundamental problems. There is absence of integrated, well-crafted and planned itinerary for tourists to visits these circuits. It is also not clear that whether these circuits fulfill the preconditions which are essential for a set of locations to be declared circuits.

3.9 Missing Backward & Forward Linkages

Tourism has been proclaimed as engine of development and hence its promotion has been given significant emphasis by the states. In Bihar, with its rich historical past and the association of locations with religion, pilgrimage tourism has taken an important place.

Backward linkages in tourism measure its relative importance as demander which leads to growth of industries that supply inputs to it. Forward linkages measure the relative importance of tourism as supplier to non-tourism industries and sectors. As per Annual Survey of Industries (2010-11), Bihar's share for number of factories was only 1.33 per cent of the entire country. Out of the total 211660 industrial units of the country, Bihar only has 2807 units. It may be attributed to the bifurcation of the state into Jharkhand. Forward linkages with other sectors of economy are either very weak or almost missing in State. If we look at the figures of large scale units approved during 2012-13, none of them are going to be established near major tourist destinations. The state is taking major leap in agro-based and dairy industry. According to Annual Survey of Industries, in 2010-11 there was 309 agro-based industrial units in the state that reached to 621 in 2010-11. The total output from such agro-based industrial units also increased from Rs. 4617.39 crore in 2009-10 to Rs. 5746.06 crore in 2010-11. Although agro-based industries are not situated near major tourist centres but Patna and Magadh division houses most of them and they are the new hubs of

agro-based industry. Tourism industry has given great push to dairy industry as well. Dairy items produced by COMFED are very popular among domestic as well as foreign tourists. COMFED and its constituent units had total turnover of Rs. 1564 crore in 2011-12 which increased to Rs. 2058 crore in 2012-13, registering 31 per cent rise in a year. Average milk collection has also increased from 6.08 lakh kg/day in 2006-07 to 12.45 lakh kg/day in 2012-13 (Economic Survey of Bihar, 2014). Apart from these two sectors exhibiting weak forward linkages with tourism industry, there is complete absence of any linkages with other sector such as mining and manufacturing.

In terms of backward linkages, tourism industry has only helped hotel industry. According to a report published by Ministry of Tourism, Government of Bihar, the total number of accommodation units (including Star category) situated in Bodhgaya and Patna was 107 and 218 respectively. The number of total accommodation units in Nalanda and Rajgir was 26 and 27 respectively. The number of accommodation units has increased substantially in the last two decades which shows that hotel industry has witnessed a boost from rising tourist arrivals in the state. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) are considered to be having strong backward as well as forward linkages with the tourism sector. However, this association is found to be very weak in the state. In Bihar during 2007-08, as many as 7202 units under MSME were registered, the number declined in 2011-12, where only 3962 units were registered. In 2012-13 the number further declined to 3737 units, and registered a negative growth rate. Currently the linkages may look weak but the battle is not totally lost. There are rays of hope and prospect. Recently, a new International University has been established in Nalanda, famous Buddhist pilgrimage tourist centre that may transform Nalanda into major educational centre. Similarly, bakery product giant Britannia Industries has established their plant in Hajipur, which may act as a catalyst in developing Hajipur-Vaishali into a major agro-processing and food-processing industrial hub.

4. OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN CIRCUIT TOURISM

4.1 Strengthening BSTDC

BSTDC has a set apparatus and well established network across the state, which can be streamlined and channelled in a way that could be beneficial for the development of tourism. It is the only government agency in the state that provides tourism superstructure and services. It is present in all destinations, considered by the private sector as non-lucrative but having huge tourism potential. The corporation has good number of skilled and un-skilled staff. These staffs can be trained in soft-

skills, etiquette and norms followed by the tourism industry all over the world. BSTDC can be improved by introducing efficient management, elimination of malpractices to create an amiable environment of work and generate goodwill among the people and tourists.

4.2 Development of Tourism Infrastructure

There is an urgent need to build tourism infrastructure in the areas where the level of tourism development is in poor or very poor state and to strengthen the level of tourism infrastructure development in the districts where it is moderate or high.

4.3 Formation of Tourism Development Authority

There is an urgent need for the establishment of an organisation like State Tourism Development Authority under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, to promote tourism in the state, assess the state of infrastructure development in various destinations and coordinate with other ministries, organisations for the improvement of tourism infrastructure in those localities. The authority should be responsible for the maintenance, conservation and preservation of all tourism resources of the state. The authority should be made responsible for the recruitment and training of tour operators, travel professionals and tourist guides for better services.

4.4 Efficient Public Transport System

The tourist destinations of Bihar also require efficient transport system for inter-city and intra-city communication. An intelligent transport system and dynamic traffic light sequence should be developed in Bodhgaya and Rajgir. A comprehensive and holistic plan is required for the de-congestion and solution of traffic problems of the major tourist destinations.

4.5 Reducing Dependency on Traditional Sources of Energy

To tackle the power woes, Bihar should reduce its dependency on traditional sources of energy. Indian government is set to formulate renewable energy act with the target to meet 20 per cent of country's energy requirements from this sector by 2020. Bihar should also focus developing alternate source of energy to meet its demand and reduce its deficit. It includes promotion and development of solar energy grid and wind energy plants. There should be provision of biomass based energy systems for rural areas. There should be widespread co-generation concepts (heat and power) for lighting, heating and cooling.

4.6 Up gradation of Security

There is an urgent need to enhance the security and safety of lesser known tourist destinations as well as the prominent ones. There should be an effective control on people who are putting the monuments in danger.

4.7 Rethinking on Marketing and Publicity Strategy

There is an urgent need to redesign the publicity and marketing strategies adopted by the state government. The internet is having greater impact on the marketing of travel and tourism than any technology. Bihar government is also using internet for marketing and promotion of tourism but it is unimpressive and ineffective. There is a need to develop comprehensive web-based Tourism Information System (TIS) for Bihar tourism with the features of interactive mapping, multi-media platform support and combination of real-time information about the weather conditions and other updates.

4.8 Redesigning Package Tours

Tour packaging is yet another area which demands immediate attention. There are package tours for Buddhist and Jain circuits but these packages are not well devised.

5. CONCLUSION

It is important for Bihar to focus on improving existing pilgrimage circuit tourism product at par with world standards. It is essential for the administrative apparatus of Bihar to adopt integrated infrastructure development plan for various pilgrimage tourism destinations. As per the report published by International Finance Corporation (IFC), despite its cultural and religious significance, tourism infrastructure along the Buddhist circuit has remained relatively underdeveloped. It is estimated that 1000 more rooms are required to meet demand, including 300-400 in the four star category and above. Despite large volumes of travellers, tourism related to pilgrimage route has failed to translate into higher incomes for local communities and the surrounding areas remains poor. Recently, Ministry of Tourism and culture released a strategy document 'Investing Buddhist Circuit'. It is a combined initiative of Ministry of Tourism, IFC, Government of Netherlands and state government of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to develop a five year roadmap to establish the Buddhist circuit as a tourist and pilgrimage destination. The roadmap outlines action needed to transform Buddhist sites and estimates about \$200 million investment required to improve infrastructure, hotels, facilities and services. The initiative also aims to create more

than 10,000 jobs and improve livelihood for communities in low-income states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In this changing economic scenario, PPP (Public-Private-Partnership) has to be implemented to improve investment climate of tourism industry in Bihar. PPP model will not only boost tourism infrastructure but it will also help in product development and diversification.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. S. Fazal D. Firdausi*

Assistant Professor (Geography), Competitive Examinations Centre, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune