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The empowerment of religious tourism in Madhubani, Bihar

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Abstract

Religious Tourism is travelling to a religious place with not only an intension of seeking blessings of the God but also enjoy the pleasure of travelling, this would include art, culture, tradition and architecture. India being one of the most religiously overwhelmed country, religious tourism plays a very important role in its development. The aim of this paper is to evaluate potential and possibilities for the empowerment of religious tourist places in Madhubani district. This study is based on primary and secondary data and followed qualitative research design. The result of the study emphasized the necessity of improving appropriate entertainment activities, upgrading the cleanliness hygiene, sanitation situation and reconstructing the prices charged for accommodation and souvenirs items which leading to the destination in order to enhance the satisfaction of pilgrims. The findings of this research may be useful in developing policy and undertaking promotional measures for intensifying pilgrimage tourism in this area.

Keywords: Religious, tourism, potential, empowerment, pilgrims

Introduction

According to World Tourism Organization, an estimated 300 to 330 million pilgrims visits the world's key sites every year. Pilgrimage tourism appears to be a newer academic concept but according to the literature reviewed, it is certainly not a new phenomenon at all. It is considered by various authors as the first form of organized tourism (Rinschede, 1992; Metreveli and Timothy, 2010) and is generally motivated exclusively by religious reasons for travel (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Madhubani has a small railway station, via which it is connected to some major cities. The Patna Airport is located at a distance of 144 Kms from Madhubani. Madhubani has a number of places having tourist interest from religious, historical, cultural and archaeological point of view. Madhubani is a district of North Bihar, a place where art and crafts have reached its stage of excellence. This part of the country is renowned for wall paintings, floor paintings, canvas painting and decorative crafts like wooden toys, Pottery toys. The tradition of Madhubani painting of Bihar has continued unbroken to the present day and has yet evolved with the times and changing more. These paintings are practiced by the women folk, which is an exclusively feminine school of folk painting. The lovely canvas paintings seen at every house in Madhubani are very much attractive, whether painted with colours or black ink. Madhubani painting is a rich traditional style, rooted in region of Mithila in Bihar. It is not only limited to the artist of the villages of Madhubani, but also it is popular beyond all over the country as well as abroad. This art is said to date back to the times of the Ramayana when it is believed Janaka who ruled Mithila, commissioned artist make painting on the occasion of his daughter Sita to Rama (www.mithilaart.com). Origin of this continuity may be traced to the continuous spell of Hindu role in Mithila from 1097 AD to 1550 AD under the Karnatas and the Oinavaras which continued uninterruptedly under the Khandavala dynasty (Darbhanga raj) till the present day (Thakur: 1882).

Literature Review

In the past pilgrimages were often associated with asceticism, self-denial and physical penitence, but today most pilgrims like to travel more comfortably (Vorzak and Gut, 2009). Currently the concept of pilgrimage tourism has shifted from its core motive to also incorporating a business motive and thus better pilgrimage facilities/services have become essential for the visitors to shrines and sacred places in order to meet the many and varied

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expectations and perceptions of the pilgrims and to promote the success of pilgrim destination and shrines in general (Ahmed, 1992). Weidenfeld (2006) suggests a focus on meeting the exceptional desires, needs and wants of pilgrims throughout their sacred journey to create a win-win situation in the pilgrimage tourism market for all stakeholders.

Vukonic (1996), in a study on religious tourism, suggests updating the pilgrimage destinations according to the changing needs of the pilgrims and urges the provision of satisfactory experiences to the tourists who visit for religious purposes and to ensure their repeat visits. Hence, to survive in competitive situations there is need to give proper attention towards needs, wants and the contentment of the traveler regarding different services desired by those who opt to visit pilgrimage sites (Singh, 2007). Tourism should be a major focus for research within religious studies.

The Times New Network on October 1, 2006 by Raja Awasthi & Ranjeni A Singh in their article Thank God! Religious tourism grows at 25% per annum have reported how religious tourism is increasing in India in the past few years the religious tourism has grown by 25% for which the credit goes to god! for whom the devotees visit the religious places. The Economic Times Bureau on October 1, 2012 the article "Need to re-polish policy to utilize hidden potential of India's religious tourism potential". In this article the author Debasis Sarkar expresses opinions about how policies need to be re-polished in order to make religious tourism better and a good experience.

Need for the study

Madhubani has important religious, cultural and historical tourist places but it received very less attention for the promotion at global level as well as domestic level. It is observed that regardless of the competitive strength, its perceptual value and emerging demands for Indian art and crafts, particularly indigenous cultural artistic products in international and domestic markets, the government as well as artistic organizations failed to explore the potential and existing opportunities. Correspondingly, the unique and traditional folk art of Mithila "Mithila Painting" due to mysterious reasons received comparatively little attention for the promotion and marketing as a tourism resource and lay minimal attention to attract tourist through the art and crafts of the region.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the research are:

- To find out the experience of pilgrims towards religious tourism in Madhubani.
- To find the satisfaction level of the visitors visiting at religious tourist places.
- To find out the potential and possibilities of religious tourism development in Madhubani.

District Highlight

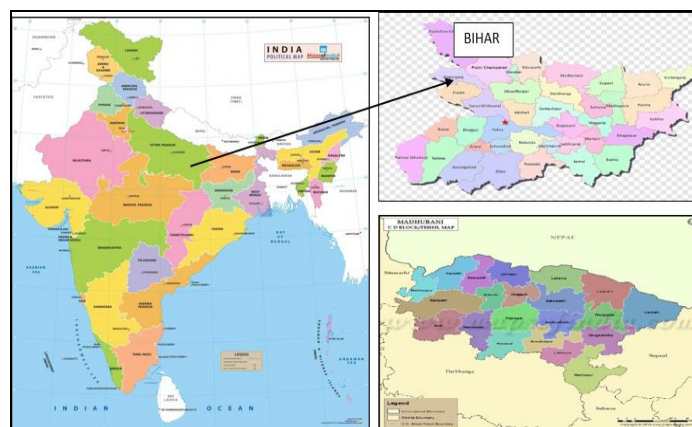
The district of Madhubani was carved out of the old Darbhanga district in the year 1972 as a result of reorganisation of the districts in the State. Madhubani District is one of the 38 administrative districts of Bihar and Madhubani town is the district headquarters. Madhubani District occupies a total area of 3501 sq. kms. It is located at a longitude of 25 degree 59 minutes to 26 degree 39 minutes east and latitude of 85 degree 43 minutes to 86 degree 42 minutes north. Madhubani District is situated at height of 80 meters above the sea level. This district is bounded on the north by a hill region of Nepal and extending to the border of Darbhanga District in the south, by Sitamarhi District in the west and by Supaul in the east. This was formerly the northern subdivision of Darbhanga district. It consists of 21 development Blocks, 1115 villages and 399 Panchayats. Madhubani fairly represents the centre of the territory once known as Mithila and the district has maintained a distinct individuality of its own.

History of Madhubani District

Madhubani District was formerly a part of Darbhanga District. In the year 1972, it was carved out as a separate district. Tharu tribe and Bhar were the early inhabitants of this region. Videha kingdom also included a huge portion of Madhubani District. After the decisive Battle of Buxar in the year 1764, British East India Company took over the control of Madhubani and other parts of Bihar. Madhubani District had played a great role in the freedom struggle of India.

Geography of Madhubani District

Madhubani District comprises vast plain and alluvial lands. Geography of Madhubani District also includes various rivers like Bagmati River, Kamla River, Kareh River, Balan River and Tiljuga River. The district has a pleasant climate with three main seasons - cold weather season, hot and dry weather season and rainy season. Winter season starts in November and continues until February. After that westerly winds start to blow and the temperature rises up to 42 degree Celsius. Rainy season sets in June and temperature begins to fall. It continues till September or mid-October.



www.mapsofindia.com

Demography of Madhubani District

The population Census 2011 says that Madhubani District had population of 4,476,044 of which male and female were 2,324,984 and 2,151,060 respectively. The population of Madhubani District constituted 4.31 percent of total population of Bihar. The average literacy rate of Madhubani in 2011 was 60.90 compared to 41.97 of 2001. If things are looked out at gender wise, male and female literacy were 72.53 and 48.30 respectively. The total literates in Madhubani District were 2,251,107 of which male and female were 1,393,708 and 857,399 respectively.

Economy of Madhubani District

Economy of Madhubani District is basically dependent on agriculture. Major crops grown in the district are Wheat, Sugarcane and Pulses. Rearing of cattle is an important subsidiary occupation of the district. The district is well stocked with cattle. A number of veterinary hospitals and dispensaries have been opened at different centres in the district which has reduced the mortality of cattle. In terms of trade and commerce, this district exports fish, handloom cloth, mangoes, sugarcane, paddy, and brass metal articles to various cities insides and outside the state. It imports medicine, machine, fine clothes, shoes, and cosmetic materials from other places. A number of rice mills and timber saw mills have been set up in the district. Madhubani has been an important centre for trade.

Culture of Madhubani District

Spinning and weaving are very old and highly developed handicrafts in Madhubani District. The Khadi Gramodyog Centre located at Madhubani is famous for weaving. This speaks of the high quality of the handloom textile of the district. The famous Madhubani Painting or the Mithila Painting as it is known is also the handwork of the people especially the women of Madhubani.



www.onefivenine.com

Paintings of Mithila

Major Tourist Sites in Madhubani

Tourism in Madhubani District includes some major places of interest are Andhratharhi, Balirajpur, Mangrauni, Uchhaith, Bhawanipur, Saurath, Satghara and Bisfi. This district is popular for its religious sites. There are some historical sites too. These attractions draw the attention of people from all parts. Travellers visit this place surely have a memorable experience.

Kapileshwar Temple

The Madhubani district situated in the Mithila contains the place called Kakraul in Rahika. This temple of Kapileshwar is situated in Kakraul. According to the mythological stories it is so believed that Kapil, an archaic sage found the “Shiva Linga”. Raj Darbhanga had taken up the responsibility of looking after the location for the past few years. At a distance of 9 Kms from Madhubani, which is the headquarters for the district, the village named Kapileswarsthan is located. The presence of the temple of Shiva has made the village quite popular. The temple is called Kapileswarsthan. Every Monday and especially in Shravan month, many a number of followers gather together here at the temple. During the festival of Maha Shiv Ratri, this place hosts a huge fair.



Kapileshwar Sthan

Uchhaith Temple

The renowned temple of Uchhaith Temple is situated in Madhubani District's Uchhaith. The temple has been dedicated to the Goddess Durga. After witnessing the utter dedication and commitment of Kalidas, Durga was amazed and impressed. Due to this reason she blessed Kalidas, who is the composer of famous 'Meghdoot' and numerous other compositions, with complete knowledge. The presence of the Bhagwati temple situated on Thumne River's western embankment has made this village quite famous. The village is located in the Benipatti block. Bhagwati blessed Kalidas, who was a prominent writer and dramatis at this very location – as believed due to many mythological stories.



Uchaita

Bhawanipur (Ugna Temple)

In Mithila, this place is known to have quite a history. In Madhubani District's Bhawanipur village, the temple of Ugna Mahadeo is located. At a distance of 14 Kms from the town of Madhubani, this temple is located. The distance between this temple and the state capital Patna is 195 Kms.

The distance between Pandaul's block headquarter and the huge village of Bhawanipur is a mere 5 Kms. The presence of the Ugaranath temple and the linkage of the village with the renowned person Vidyapati, a poet, have made this village quite famous. At this very location, Lord Shiva appeared along with "Kavi Vidyapati". He came in the form of 'Ugna', Vidyapati's servant. Lord Shiva presented Vidyapati with 'gangajal'. As per the mythological stories it is believed that Vidyapati dedicated follower of Lord Shiva and because of this reason Vidyapati was served by Lord Shiva himself as Ugna.



Bhawanipur

Nagar Fort (Nau Lakha Palace)

The town of Rajnagar is situated close to the place called Madhubani in Bihar. This town of Rajnagar contains the Naulakha Palace. Darbhanga's Maharaja Rameshwar Singh constructed this palace. During the time of the occurrence of the earthquake in the year 1934, the Palace was utterly destroyed and since then the palace was not restructured. At present, the palace lies in relics.



Nagar Fort

Saurath

Situated on the road that goes from Madhubani to Jaynagar, the village of Saurath is a small road side village. A temple named Somnath Mahadev temple is present in the village. The Maithili Brahmins come together every year in an annual Sabha with proposals of marriages which culminate into weddings. This event adds to the significance of the village.



Saurath

Phulhar

This village is associated with Ramayana epic. Phulhar village was situated in one of Raja Janak's prime gardens. It was in Jamun (Madhubani) and was celebrated for a Gauri temple where Sita prayed regularly. After paying obeisance to his Guru Vishwamitra when Shri Ram entered the floral section of the garden, Sita, who was present there, got her first glimpse of Shri Ram.



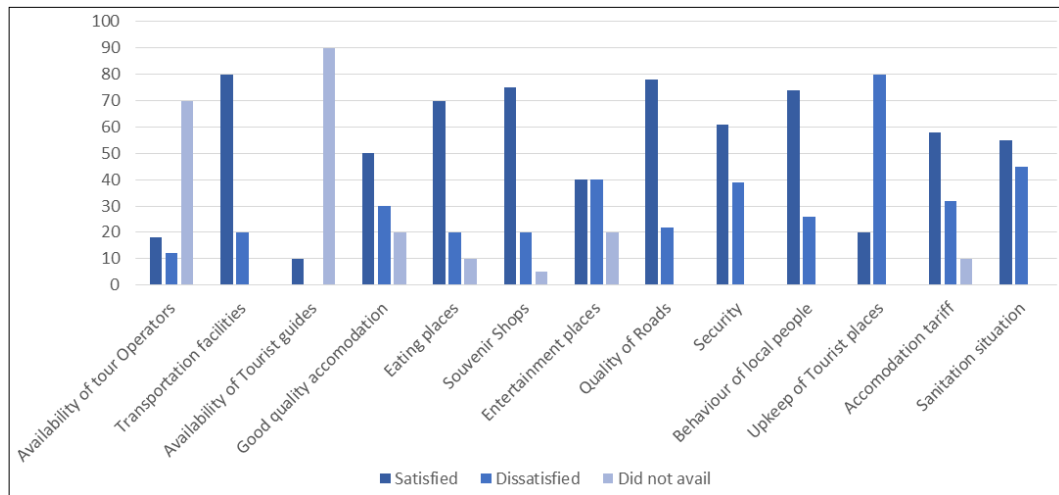
Mata Girija Temple, Phulhar

Data Sources & Methodology

The present study is mostly exploratory in nature with extensive literature survey carried out for gaining the relevant information on religious tourism resources from various primary and secondary data sources which include district census handbook and other reliable government publications articles, news report prints, journals, field visits and interviews were undertaken for exploring the regional aspects and religious tourism centers of the study area. Considering the scope of newer opportunities, few suggestions are keeping in mind the resource availability in the district.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

The analysis has done in order to understand the satisfaction and dissatisfaction rate of tourists to Madhubani as religious tourism place. The factors considered for satisfaction and dissatisfaction were availability of tour operators, availability of transportation, availability of tourist guide, availability of good quality accommodation, eating places, souvenir shops, entertainment places, quality of roads, security, behaviour of local people, up keeping of tourist sites, sanitation situation and accommodation tariff.



Satisfaction and dissatisfaction rates in Darbhanga

Findings

The possibilities and potential of religious tourism in Madhubani are as follows:

- Religious tourism in Madhubani shall lead to revenue generation through various sources for local people, which shall lead to increase in per capita income.
- Opportunity for the private player to play a bigger role.
- Opportunity for new entrepreneur to compete in the market.
- Availability of guides can be encouraged.
- Transportation industry has a very good market.
- Hospitality and eating places have an opportunity to flourish and need to increase sanitation situation in town area.
- Opportunity to increase employment for local people.
- Opportunity to increase advertisement of that tourist places.
- Opportunity to earn tax revenue from transportation, accommodation and other services.
- Opportunity to increase standard of living of people in Madhubani.

Conclusion

The experiences of pilgrims are satisfactory. An overall 53% of the total respondents have given positive reviews where 29.69% respondents gave negative reviews and 16.54% respondents did not availed facilities. Madhubani can still be developed as religious tourism and can create a better potential for development. In spite of all facilities yet there is a scope to develop and grow. Better efforts have to be made by government in a righter perspective so that Madhubani can grow as one of the best places of religious tourism.

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