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An Investigation into the Environmental Effects of Religious Tourism in Courtallam and its Neighbouring Areas in Tenkasi District

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Abstract

This study explores the various environmental impacts of religious tourism in Courtallam, located in Tenkasi District. Known as the “Spa of South India,” Courtallam’s sacred waterfalls and temples attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year, especially during the summer peak. While this influx provides significant economic benefits, it puts great pressure on the region’s fragile natural systems. The study concludes that the increasing number of tourists is approaching, and in some cases exceeding, the destination’s ecological capacity. It stresses the importance of shifting from mass religious tourism to a sustainable pilgrimage approach. The paper suggests several practical solutions, including creating and enforcing a comprehensive carrying capacity plan, investing in decentralized eco-friendly infrastructure, establishing reliable waste segregation and treatment systems, running on-going environmental awareness campaigns for pilgrims, and promotin,

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Environmental Impact, Sustainable Pilgrimage, Carrying Capacity, Waste Management, Courtallam.

Introduction

Courtallam is known as the Spa of South India and attracted thousands of pilgrims and tourists to visit it to find healing powers as well as rejuvenation of their spirit. The area is characterized with a number of temples and natural monuments which are important in the socio-economic setting of Tenkasi District boosting the local economies and sustaining the community livelihoods. The sharing of the major cultural traditions like festivals and rituals also enhances the flow of visitors bringing opportunities and challenges to the sustainability of the environment. Religious tourism has become a relatively significant phenomenon that is gaining momentum on the

global scale and combines cultural, spiritual, and ecological factors. In Tamil Nadu, particularly, in the places like Courtallam that are known as sacred waterfalls and temples, the interdependence of religious tourism and environmental sustainability becomes paramount. This paper aims at looking at environmental impact of religious tourism in Courtallam and the surrounding regions of Tenkasi District that is rich in cultural heritage and natural resources. The primary aim of this research is to critically evaluate the environmental consequences of religious tourism in Courtallam and the local areas hence providing an in-depth insight on how religious tourism affects local ecologies and cultural heritage. The aim of this study is to improve sustainable tourism practices and policies through an assessment of both the benefits and costs, which will guarantee that the natural environment is valued and at the same time the spiritual requirements of the community are also honoured.

Review of Literature

Prakash Gautam (2023), this study was meant to determine the impact of religious tourism on the local entrepreneurs surrounding the Manakamana temple. It is a well-known pilgrimage site in Nepal and a source of huge revenue to many individuals. It keeps many people, particularly those operating small businesses with minimal start up funds to earn a living not only to themselves but also to their families. Although these small businesses in religious places are virtually self-governing, in reality, they are connected to all the other activities taking place in the Manakamana area. The success and retention of them is highly dependent on the local events and festivals, and what other businesses and individuals around are doing. The hotels, restaurants, and celebrations around them also determine the money that these businesses will generate. When businesses are diverse then that sets good money-making opportunities among people. Whether the very small, small, medium, and big businesses relate to one another and how they all work towards making money remain a mystery. We will also be examining the effect of the annual festivals at these religious places on the future amount of money to be generated. Even though religious tourism is not a mass phenomenon, a number of scholars across various regions are taking an interest in it.

Jaeyeon Choe (2025), in religious studies, tourism, cultural anthropology, geography, history, psychology, sociology, city planning and even English literature. To truly master this sphere and make it more balanced, scholars must collaborate with government representatives, tourism enterprises, the citizens of the locations and even religious organizations. In so doing, they will be able to devise effective solutions to the issues that the destinations and local communities are addressing. To give an example, collaborating more with the specialists of the field of public health may assist us in determining how some religious tourism activities in fact assist people in healing and feeling better. Such a study can even deliver solutions to stressed health systems and the rising healthcare cost. We must also go further on how religious travel experience can result in personal transformation as well as how individuals develop as a result of religious tourism. One should think critically about the role of religious tourism in improving the long-term health of the nearby communities, contributing to poverty reduction, and making things more convenient. It is also possible to look into the opportunities of using digital solutions such as AI and virtual reality to enhance accessibility and enable individuals to do so virtually. There is more research that we should undertake in order to manage risks, protect the environment, and act on climate change.

Objectives

1. To explore the good environmental impacts in religious tourism among the sample respondents.
2. To investigate the religious tourism on the negative environmental impacts amongst the sample respondents.
3. To draw conclusions into recommendations that will be practical in enhancing sustainable religious tourism that balances the ecological integrity with the socio-economic and cultural demands.

Methodology

The research study is descriptive in nature. The researcher has used the survey technique to determine the impact of religious tourism on the environment in Courtallam and the surrounding environs within the Tenkasi district. It was designed to use a structured questionnaire to gather the data. The number of sample respondents was 150 tourists in the area of study. The questionnaire would contain personal data regarding the respondents, and their knowledge regarding the environmental impact linked with religious tourism. Every factor was assessed with the help of the five-point Likert scale (1- strongly agree, 2- agree, 3- neutral, 4- disagree, 5- strongly disagree). Stratified random sampling technique was adopted in choosing the respondents in the study area.

Result and Interpretation

The results of the survey provide us with a decent glimpse of what the local population thinks of the positive things that the religious tourism brings. The following is a summary of what the Likert scale answers can tell us with regards to the various positive impacts.

S. No	Positive Effects in Religious Tourism	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Average
1	Infrastructure Facilities	64	38	28	12	8	3.92
2	The nearby forests and all the plants and animals are not suffering	50	22	51	16	11	3.56
3	Its more important to protect the environment than to make revenue from tourism	28	25	75	12	10	3.32
4	Safety and Security for tourists	82	22	24	18	4	4.06
5	Economic Benefits for local businesses	58	15	24	35	18	3.4

Interpretation

Most people appear to concur with this idea most with a top score of 3.92, that religious tourism has led to improved infrastructure in the locality. In particular, there were 64 individuals who agreed strongly. This is an indication that as religious tourism increases, so does the infrastructure in the area such as improved roads and other facilities to accommodate the tourists. All these would be beneficial to the local economy, as well as attracting more tourists to these trips.

The positive attitude toward infrastructure is, however, counterbalanced by a lower result of 3.56 in the health of the local plant and animal life and forests. Half of the respondents were emphatic that the natural environment is not being harmed, but this would mean there is a medium concern of balancing the forces of tourism and environmental protection. The mixed reaction with 22 people responding to the yes and a decent number of 51 responding to the neutral indicates that although there are locals who do not see any evil, there are those who are not confident; or rather believe that tourism could be damaging the local ecosystems.

The perception that environmental conservation is more important than tourism is enhancing money earned was rated at 3.32. This demonstrates that it is an item of reflection to many. There were only 28 who strongly agreed but a good number of 75 were neutral showing that they have not yet formed their minds. This division implies that whereas there are citizens eager to emphasize on the environment, most citizens may not be entirely aboard particularly in those destinations where tourism is a primary income earner.

Another factor that was of great importance and which scored highly on average of 4.06 was the safety and security of tourists. A great majority of 82 persons strongly concurred with this. This implies that as a rule, the people are happy with the safety precautions, which is crucial to ensure tourism continues and that all the people both the visitors and the locals feel safe.

The mean score of the economic benefits in respect to local businesses was 3.4. This demonstrates that people have quite ambivalent attitudes towards it, with 24 individuals remaining indifferent. Though there were a good number of people who strongly agreed that tourism aids the local economy, that 35 said no and 18 said strongly no means that there are some concerns. They may also be worried whether these benefits are indeed benefiting everybody or whether they are substantial enough to compensate other factors such as increased cost of living or environmental degradation.

Negative Effects

The survey examines the attitude towards negative environmental impacts concerning religious tourism according to the information provided. The overall analysis, based on 5-point Likert scale (with a higher weighted mean representing greater agreement to the fact that an issue is a negative effect), presents the most urgent issues, namely, overcrowding and water pollution caused by personal care products.

S. No	Negative Effects in Religious Tourism	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Average
1	Usage of Soap and Shampoo	75	24	32	10	9	3.97
2	Disposal of Food and Clothes into river	52	22	48	18	10	3.58
3	Littering	48	18	52	24	8	3.49
4	Overcrowd	74	32	20	18	6	4
5	Noise disrupt the natural Soundscape	35	22	50	22	21	3.18

Use of Shampoo and Soap (Weighted Average: 3.97) It is widely agreed that the ritual washing (bathing in rivers or other holy water bodies) uses shampoos and soaps, which pollute. This answer is the most heavily backed in this category with 75 people saying Strongly Agree meaning that there is a grave threat to water quality.

Food and Clothes into Rivers (Weighted Average: 3.58) has a high level of support (52 Strongly Agree), although the large number of respondents with an incorrect answer (48) suggests that although the practice negatively impacts water bodies, a significant number of respondents might view this as a problematic issue.

Littering (Weighted Average: 3.49) has the high counts of the “Neutral” (52) and strong agree (48) but it is near the point of Neutral. This implies that littering is a problem but the respondents might believe that it is a rare problem or not as serious as overcrowding or water pollution.

Overcrowding (Weighted Average: 4.0) is the most rated negative effect. 106 respondents (74 strongly Agree + 32 Agree) consider overcrowding to be a major issue. This indicates that there is more pilgrims than the carrying capacity which can lead to traffic, strain a lot on the local services and potentially lead to poor visitor experience.

The product that is rated the lowest, Noise Disrupting Natural Soundscape (Weighted Average: 3.18), is more neutral than others. There were 93 neutral and disagree and strongly disagreeing respondents (50+22+21) who were compared to 57 agreeing and strongly agreeing respondents (35+22). This means that unlike physical pollution, noise is not considered a significant problem to the environment, although it is found to be a pain.

Suggestions

1. Put up a scheduled monitoring system of physicochemical and microbiological parameters in the waterfalls and other water bodies surrounding the areas to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases.
2. Build enough sewage treatment systems and toilets to eradicate defecation and direct dumping of waste and detergent in the waterfalls.
3. Strict punitive actions should be taken against littering, use of plastics and illegal constructions in areas that are sensitive ecologically.
4. Carrying capacity assessment should be conducted to limit the number of tourists in the major seasons to reduce pressure to the delicate ecosystem.
5. Promote green tourism projects such as yoga and Ayurveda resorts which appeal to the natural, therapeutic spirit of the area, rather than uncontrolled and intensive tourism.
6. Get involved in the educational activities and create awareness to pilgrims and local residents regarding environmental care and natural resources preservation.
7. Conserve the forests that surround it, which are important towards supporting the flow and purity of the falls.

Conclusion

The impact of religious tourism in Courtallam is significant on the surrounding environment and as a result, causes pollution of water in waterfalls, generation of waste and ecological burden to the Western Ghats particularly during seasons. Despite the fact that it boosts the economy, appreciation of culture, the large number of visitors requires instant sustainable management that can protect the water quality and natural ecosystem. The bathing or religious sacrifice (including ghee and flowers) in the waterfalls are some of the causes of water pollution and increase the water borne diseases. Some of these waterfalls include the Main Falls and Five Falls. This influx of tourists, especially during the season of June to September, causes a growth of the plastic waste and littering in the fragile and mountainous forested ecological areas. Tourism is highly seasonal, and this exerts a high demand on the local infrastructures and n7j5h4f3e0e, Studies have shown that though tourism plays a very significant part in the region, applications of the eco-tourism principles, regular water quality audit and visitor control are important measures

to minimize environmental degradation. The results suggest that to achieve the sustainability of Courtallam as a major tourist destination in the long run, the stakeholders should strike a balance between religious/tourist and environmental protection programs.

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