ANALYZING TOURISM POTENTIAL AND DESTINATION IMAGE OF INDIAN SILK ROUTE: TREND ANALYSIS APPROACH

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Abstract   *Purpose: Analyzing the competitiveness of Silk Route in tourism industry involves a contemporary approach as it is among the tagline that connects the nations like India, China, Pakistan, etc. Also analysis of the tourists' considerations towards Indian Silk Route that connect India to other countries could help to develop its in various forms and creating an image among tourists destination's list and choice, thus contributing to the formation of an integrity of the nations as well. Hence this research paper aims to study the present status of Indian Silk Route destinations in terms of tourism competitiveness and to develop its image as a tourist circuit in consideration to tourists visiting Silk Route destinations in India.*

Research Methodology: The main data collection method of this study is primary research supported by secondary research by making use of existing online sources. In addition to this to calculate or forecast the tourist arrivals on the basis of past data available, the Least Square Method of time series is applied.

Findings: The analyzed data shows that if the induced destinations of Silk Route in Indian subcontinent are raised to the level of competitiveness and analyzed at the tourism front, may have an immense potential to attract the tourists to India.

Limitations: The area for the research purpose is limited fewer destinations as U.P and Bihar as for the further study area/areas could be increased and various other methodologies may be applied..

Keywords: *Silk Route, Destination image, Cultural Exchange, Integrity.*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Silk Route has played the role of a bridge between Asia and Europe, thus allocating a fundamental link for exchanging cultures, crafts, ideas, technologies, and beliefs. Silk Route has served as a confluence of civilizations and the reopening of this old route will make Jammu and Kashmir a favorite spot for tourism. The major roads that connect Jammu and Kashmir with rest of the world are Jammu-Sialkot, Poonch-Rawalkot, Uri-Muzafarabad, Kargil-Skardu, Leh-Mansarovar and Leh-Yarkand, stretching towards Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Sikkim. History has also revealed that these routes contributed greatly to economy, cultural and political development of Jammu and Kashmir and other Indian destinations as it is known for their historical and cultural contacts with outside regions of Central Asia, Xinjiang and Tibet.

The relative image of all these destinations is still an unknown part or politically controversial for the tourists, that had once remained a source for trade and in other form a cause for the tourism activity. The concept of destination image helps in making a tourism market share and same can be applicable to the Silk Route. Ramazan Aksoy & Şule Kiyci (2011) has supported that destinations with strong infrastructures, sufficient investments, positive images and different products gain much more shares from the market. In other words destination image plays a prominent role in this process and thus effects on destination choice and decisions of tourists. Thus, image becomes one of the main assets of a tourist destination and one which has the most influence on the decision taken by tourists when choosing a destination (Sérgio Dominique Ferreira Lopes, 2011). The image formation of Silk Route in the tourism concept needs to be appreciated as a heritage or historical route. However the concept of heritage routes is termed to be a rich and fertile one, offering a privileged framework in which mutual understanding, a plural approach to history and a culture of peace is significant.

As a semantic affair to image formation in modern tourism industry Silk Route concept needs to be understood for the tourists as well as for community and stake holders. The image that potential tourists have about that destination is the main factor which determines the future of that destination.

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According to Buhalis (2000) partnership between the public and private sector, co-operation between all local suppliers and use of new technologies and the Internet are among the key success factors of a tourism destination.

Understanding the image formation process may help to improve the attractiveness and market competitiveness of tourist destinations (Yoon & Kim, 2000). The formation of Silk Route as a unique travel circuit in India would acknowledge the induced destinations in India other than their usual travel recognitions.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the present status and image of the destinations along Silk Route in India and
2. To understand their future prospects in terms of tourism in special reference to Silk Route destinations in India.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

India has always been known to the tourism world for its beauty and unique tourism properties but its contribution to Silk Route is still unknown to the tourist. As referred to the tourists by the Destination Management organizations, Indian subcontinent has been branded as a 'must see destination' all over the world, but its significance to the Silk Route connection remains dormant in tourism even in this booming times. So the study aims at rediscovering and imaging the tourism resources and potentialities of induced destinations of Silk Route in India. The study also intends to identify and highlight the problem areas in the tourism development in the region. Any positive result in this direction derived from this research can be anticipated to contribute a lot not only to the destination promotion and creating the image among tourists in addition to the economic wellbeing of the local residents of destinations but to the entire economy of the nation.

SCOPE AND COVERAGE

This study aims to describe the present status and image of the induced destinations of Silk route in India. This study also intends to study and measure the tourism potential of the destinations along with the services that are available along these destinations but have not been highlighted with the tagline of Silk Route as these are somehow remained a part of such historical aspect.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The understanding of this process is viable to reposition unfavorable destinations and improve higher demand and supply of repeat visits with the intention to make

profit (Mazlina Jamaludin et. al, 2012). The importance of a favorable image for a destination to attract tourists is undoubtedly of highest value as a positive image has more chance to be considered in the destination selection process than a negative image (Beerli, 2004). In terms of Silk Route which has become an unknown part to the world tourists, developing a strong image of Silk Route in India as tourist circuit is a crucial part as tourism industry itself at a growing stage. Considering touristic destinations, it is possible to define image as the facts such as shape, slogan, picture or writing which includes every kind of facilities that are attractive for a country's or a region's tourism; that makes an impression in target people's mind. In other words, image is a view of picture that attracts the visitors to the country and makes them spend much more money there (Sahbaz, 2008). But the change in trade and travel trends has faded the image of Silk Route among the tourists' and traders priority list. A due consideration towards the tourism development along the Silk Route especially in Indian sub continent may help to revitalize its importance and hence add on the to the tourism destination typology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main data collection method of this study is primary research supported by secondary research by making use of existing online sources. Secondary research consisted use of academic journals and reports from Indian Tourism Department. Primary research was conducted to capture better understanding of the current perception of destination image of Silk Route Destinations.

In addition to this in order to calculate or forecast the tourist arrivals on the basis of past data available, the Least Square Method of time series is applied.

Then on the basis of that data the potential of services and facilities at a destination is analyzed.

ASPECTS OF SILK ROAD REVITALIZATION THROUGH DESTINATION IMAGE

A good image and a positive reputation are probably the most valuable assets that a country possess. Researchers has identified the prospects of destination image and evaluated various approaches. According to Gartner (1993) destination image becomes an important component of destination selection as soon as an individual decides to travel. Only destinations which the decision making body is aware of will be included in the perceived opportunity set. Awareness implies than an image of the destination exists in the mind(s) of the decision makers. Henderson (2007) has also supported that destination image is multidimensional,

with cognitive and affective elements; it is a mix of information, feelings, beliefs, opinions, ideas, expectations and perceptions about a certain place.

The Silk Route may be redundant but remnants of this route still exist in the valley of Kashmir and the arid desert of Ladakh, a testimonial of the times gone by but has lost its image as well as importance in terms of tourism as well as trade and need to be defined for its existence in the industry. Considering touristic destinations, it is possible to define image as the facts such as shape, slogan, picture or writing which includes every kind of facilities that are attractive for a country's or a region's tourism; which makes an impression in target people's mind. In other words, image is a view of picture that attracts the visitors to the country and makes them spend much more money there (Şahbaz, 2008). Images are more important than tangible resources, all because perceptions, rather than reality are what motivate consumers to act or not act (Guthrie and Gale, 1991). According to Suzan Çoban (2012) a positive destination image and satisfaction, is the basis for tourist' visits all over again. If a destination that provides accommodation for the faithful tourists who repeat periodically, it will provide employment opportunities and economic benefits to its citizens. It will also contribute to form a solid foundation in the long-term development of the region. And that can be obtained in terms of Indian Silk Route destinations.

The expert committee on 'Routes as a Part of our Cultural Heritage' which met at Madrid, Spain, November 1994 has defined that "A heritage route is composed of tangible elements of which the cultural significance comes from exchanges and a multi-dimensional dialogue across countries or regions, and that illustrate the interaction of movement, along the route, in space and time." The Silk Road did not only promote commodity exchange but also cultural. For example, Buddhism as one of the religions of the Kushan kingdom reached China as well as India. Together with merchant caravans Buddhist monks went from India to Central Asia and China, preaching the new religion. Buddhist monuments were discovered in numerous cities along the Silk Road in India.

Moreover, during the General Assembly of ICOMOS, that took place in December 2002 in Spain, the recommendation was put forward that Cultural Routes are independent from Cultural Landscapes both in concept and substance. In this context, the following points should be considered when determining whether a heritage route is suitable for inscription on the World Heritage List:

(i) The requirement to hold outstanding universal value should be recalled.

(ii) The concept of heritage routes:

- is based on the dynamics of movement and the idea of exchanges, with continuity in space and time;

- refers to a whole, where the route has a worth over and above the sum of the elements making it up and through which it gains its cultural significance;

- highlights exchange and dialogue between countries or between regions;

- is multi-dimensional, with different aspects developing and adding to its prime purpose which may be religious, commercial, administrative or otherwise.

(iii) A heritage route may be considered as a specific, dynamic type of cultural landscape, just as recent debates have led to their acceptance within the Operational Guidelines.

(iv) The identification of a heritage route is based on a collection of strengths and tangible elements, testimony to the significance of the route itself.

(v) The conditions of authenticity are to be applied on the grounds of its significance and other elements making up the heritage route. It will take into account the duration of the route, and perhaps how often it is used nowadays, as well as the legitimate wishes for development of peoples affected.

This statement stands realistic to the Silk route that follows Jammu and Kashmir State, Uttar Pardesh, Bihar and Sikkim and has remained a part of historical trade route connecting and making the northern most state of Indian subcontinent to rest of the world.

Destinations involved and their present images

A well known Chinese Buddhist scholar and translator, Hieun Tsiang (c. 602 – 664), was in Lumbini in 637, before he was heading to Kushinagar, the place where Buddha passed away, and to Sarnath in present India, where he had given his first sermon (Bernstein 2001, Wriggins 2004). This way was linking Varanasi and Bodhgaya in India with Kapilvastu, Lumbini, Bhutwal and Ridi in Central Nepal, leading further through the Mustang region in Nepal to West Tibet and the Brahmaputra valley, continuing from there to Khotan as well to Kashgar, partly via Ladakh (Heide, 2012). Recently more evidences have been found that in ancient times three passages through Nepal presumably have linked the Silk Roads with the Gangetic plains, especially with the Buddhist holy places and great Buddhist Universities of India particularly in the area of Magadha, today being part of the present State of Bihar with its capital Patna, formerly Pataliputra (Heide, 2012). Further it extends to meet at Yu-men-kuan or the Jade Gate near Tun-hueng before entering the Chinese mainland. Moreover from early times, the Indian sub-continent was connected to the Grand Silk Route through a network of sub-routes criss-crossing "Greater Kashmir" or what presently constitutes Jammu and Kashmir in India and Azad Jammu Kashmir in Pakistan (Kaw, 2009) thus, forming an elongated and interwoven network.

MAP: Silk Route Connectivity and India's Contribution

(Source: http://isikkim.com/2011-06-south-asia-china-india-and-silk-route-066/)

Many of these sites like Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Lumbini, Kushinagar has been developed by the ministry of Tourism in India as a major Buddhist pilgrimage circuit. But its ultimate connectivity to the early history of Silk Route needs a due evaluation and recognition. Furthermore the eventual crisis of 1947 in Jammu and Kashmir and subsequent closure of the Silk Route brought an end to its golden era. The business activities continued to some extent for two more years when the historic route was finally closed. Also as a consequence of 1962 war between India and China, the other trade links via Leh and Tibet were also shut. There are number of locations that are untapped and can be developed as major tourist destinations, having the entire natural as well as the cultural resources for attracting tourists as the procedure of negligence towards all these destinations the central Asian trade links with India through Jammu and Kashmir towards Sikkim and other induced destinations has lost their identity.

Potential of tourist arrivals in Kashmir and its forecasts

In a report submitted to Ministry of tourism and Government of India in 2012, ILFS (Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services) has analyzed the tourism potential and increase in tourism trend by the Buddhists' destinations at Uttar Pradesh till 2008 (Refer to Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). These estimates (Figure 1 and 2) indicate that Kushinagar, Sarnath, Gaya (Bodhgaya) and Rajgir are the key destinations that have registered huge number of tourist inflows (both domestic and foreign) (ILFS, 2012). On the other hand, the sites as Kapilvastu, Sravasti, Sankisa and Vaishali are also potential destinations that can be developed as key tourism sites due to their increasing tourist inflows. Furthermore analyzing above given data in totality (Table 1) for the future tourism potential of these destinations as a circuit may serve to be positive track towards the development process altogether, i.e. Sarnath, Kushinagar, Kapilavastu, Saravasti, Sankisa,

Gaya, Bodhgaya, Rajgir & Vaishali. (**Take in Table I**)

As all these above discussed destinations are a part of Silk Route their tourism arrival along the circuit is forecasted for the year 2014 using the least square method Time series "T- Factor" is applied (**Take in Table II**).

As $\Sigma y = na + b\Sigma x$,

    $a = \Sigma y/n$, 16893380/4 = 4223345

Also $\Sigma xy = a\Sigma x + b\Sigma x$

    $b = \Sigma xy/\Sigma x2$, 249651937/20 = 12482596.85

Hence $y = (2014) = 4223345 + (12482596.85) (15)$

        $= 250589127.75$

The above given interpretation to the tourist arrival gives a brief idea about the tourists' arrivals at Buddhist circuit of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar that falls in the Silk Route map. In order to calculate the trend value (Y^) for a particular year 2014, the value of "a" and "b" is needed, which is calculated after applying the above statistical formulas like Summation of x and xy. It has been seen that the services and facilities available at this region, posses the potential of serving 250589127.75, thus indicating the tourism potential to be gained by the destinations.

FINDINGS

The above given interpretation to the tourist arrival gives a brief idea about the tourists' arrivals at various destinations that falls in the Silk Route map. In order to calculate the trend value (Y^) for a particular year 2014, the value of "a" and "b" is needed, which is calculated after applying the above statistical formulas like summation of x and xy. It has been seen that the services and facilities available at this region, posses the potential of serving 250589127.75 tourists in the same year that all are confined to the interest of tourists towards nature tourism, adventure tourism and other but not to those particular destinations that are a part of

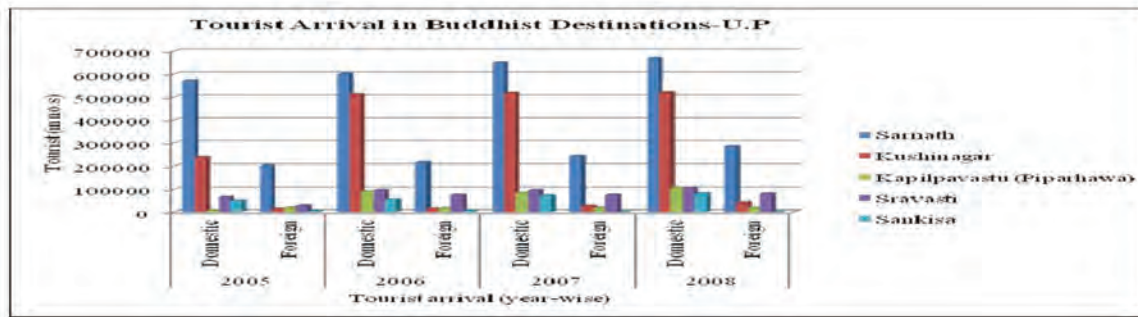**Figure 1: Tourist arrival trends in Buddhist destinations, Uttar Pradesh**

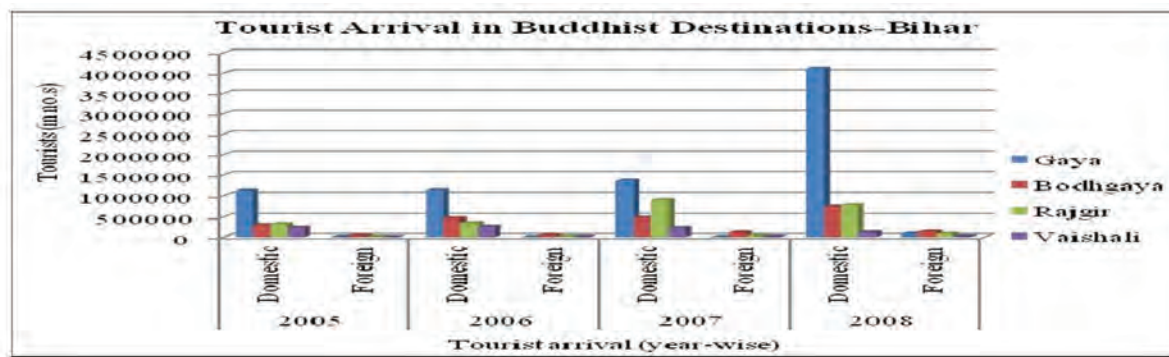**Figure 2: Tourist arrival trends in Buddhist destinations, Bihar**

Table I: Total no. of Tourists' arrival at Buddhist destinations of U.P and Bihar

Years	No of tourist arrivals	Deviations from 2006.5	x	xy	x^2	$y\hat{} = a+bx$
2005	104337	-1.5	-3	-313011	9	-33224445.5
2006	3975660	-0.5	-1	-3975660	1	-8259251.8
2007	4906276	0.5	1	4906276	1	16705841.8
2008	8011444	1.5	3	24034332	9	41671135.5
TOTAL	16893380			249651937	20	
2014(forecasted figure)	250589127.75 (obtained after applying the least square method of time series for calculating the trend)					

Silk Route and could be an additional source of attraction to the tourists in the coming years if developed and maintained to their authentication. The development of the induced destination(s) of Silk Route could serve as a compliment to Indian tourism and trade industry. The restitution of the traditional Ladakh Route may also serve the security goals of India and China (Mushtaq A. Kaw, 2009). Thus, to become a successful and competitive tourism destination, all destinations must strategically promote specific location endowments that distinguish one place from another. In this regard, tourism experts, tour operators, and travel agents, in addition to independent travelers, acquire knowledge and awareness (Binns and Nel 2002; Kim and Perdue 2011). Analysis of tourism potential at the silk route destinations may not only promote the related or induced destination but

may also serve in raising the development graph by the direct or indirect economy generation through tourism. Therefore, while developed destinations require updated and renewed facilities, these potential destinations will require more attention in terms of basic tourist facilities and promotional aspects. More particularly they need to be marketed as Silk Route destinations, which have been a major aspect of their existence. Analysis of tourism potential at the Silk Route destinations may not only promote the related or induced destination but also serve in raising the development graph by the direct or indirect economy generation through tourism.

Also Archaeology Survey of India (2010) has identified and enlisted twelve different sites as Silk Route properties at various Indian destinations making a stretch from Ladakh to Sikkim and hence connecting China. All these sites

Table II: Application of the least square method of time series for calculating the trend

Years	Total no. of Tourist Arrivals
2005	10 4337
2006	3975660
2007	4906276
2008	8011444

Source: ILFS Infrastructure, Report on Identification of Tourism Circuits across India

have a potential to be established as historical, pilgrimage destinations as well as alternate or sustainable tourism that needs to be assessed and analyzed properly.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The changing scenario and emergence of new concepts in tourism industry increases the competition level among destinations and hence makes the existence of the new and emerging destinations difficult. In context to Silk route that has the historical as well as the cultural significance is an unknown part to the tourists instead it could be a part of integrity it given due consideration through tourism. Furthermore, for destination stakeholders it also constitutes an important factor for achieving the success of destination attractiveness (Nelson Matos et al, 2012). No doubt these destinations are somehow on local tourists' approach but their origin and basic concept is still anonymous to them. Not only this, reopening of as a complete travel circuit in destinations as Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarpradesh, etc. could increase the tourist to large extent and also helps in the development of these destinations in terms of cultural, historical as well as the MICE, that has lost their identity that had once been a part of the trade, cultural and civilization exchange as inconsideration with services and facilities available at the above destinations can cater to the respective tourists. The re-opening of traditional trade routes would help reconcile the diverse interests of the traditional Silk Route partners and help restore free trade and human mobility as well as cross-cultural and ideological fertilization (Mushtaq A. Kaw, 2009). The need for the recommendations for the development of the tourist circuit should be levied on the following point:

1. Develop awareness among tourists' as well as tour operators about the Indian Silk Route destinations.

2. Development of various tourist amenities at these destinations so as to make them available to tourists.

3. Restoration of these destinations that are almost at the stage of extinction is also a foremost important.

4. Silk Route destinations should also be included in the tourists' itinerary along with other prominent destination.

5. Strategic framework should be provided in order to measure and develop capacity building approach to these destinations.

6. Also there is a requirement of infrastructure like transportation and accommodation facilities development at above referred destinations

LIMITATIONS

As various other research studies, the current study has some theoretical and methodological limitations. First, the research was carried out in some of the destinations related to Silk Route as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. And therefore the findings are geographically bound and are likely to have limited application to other destinations, regions. Second, the methodological approach of trend analysis has been applied and for the further studies other research techniques could also be applied. Apart of these limitations, it is hoped that this study will stimulate further research on Silk Route destinations in terms of image building in the tourism sector to provide valuable insights for both academics and practitioners for studying and identifying the alternate tourism prospects in the state.

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