

Indian Tourism Sector during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The Novel Corona virus, most commonly referred as COVID-19, has crossed all border in a very short period of time. Covid-19 pandemic is far by the greatest crisis the world has ever witnessed, and it is even worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s. It is one of the kinds of humanitarian disasters which has affected people and business worldwide triggering a global economic crisis. Many sectors have been damaged due to the pandemic - induced lockdown and due to multiple waves and mutants of the virus. One of the damaged sectors due to Covid-19 is certainly tourism. Tourism sector witnessed unaccounted revenue losses during Covid-19. The world was going digital during pandemic in almost all aspects but one of the activities can't go digital is traveling! For service sector, tourism is a major source of growth and employment and it has been hit the most during Covid-19. As because national boundaries were closed, non-functioning of airlines services and other modes of transport at standstill as well, as it is the need in order to break the chain of virus and to take care public health. On account of this here I wish to analyse the challenging issues experienced by the tourism sector in India.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemic, Tourism

Introduction: The severity of the pandemic may be assessed based on the figures of the past epidemics such as SARS, Spanish Flu etc. Tourism and hospitality businesses are profoundly affected by Covid-19 that has been declared as Pandemic on 12th March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Due to Covid-19 pandemic, travel and tourism industry's employment loss is predicted to be 100.08 million worldwide (Statista, 2020). According to Liu et al (2019), the most dynamic sector is the tourism industry that benefits many other sectors like lodging, catering, transportation, retails, entertainment, etc contributing to economics growth globally. It has been reported that tourism growth has outperformed the World GDP record from the past consecutively from the year 2011 to 2017 (WTTC 2018). Due to sudden lockdown and complete ban on travelling, tourism which contributes to great extent to Country's GDP growth immensely affected due to Covid 19. Also, local communities and local businesses which are highly dependent on the tourism for their livelihood faced drastic impact during Covid 19. To rebuild tourism sector after Covid 19 was a great challenge for the country as a whole.

Indian Tourism Sector During COVID-19: -

It is fact that Corona virus disease (Covid 19) threat originated from Central China's Hubei province in Wuhan city in December 2019 and continues to adversely affect more than 150 countries and claimed more than 50,000 lives globally. In a matter of weeks, over 100,000 cases and thousands of deaths were confirmed globally, On

January 30, 2020, the World Health Organisation designated the COVID-19 outbreak a "public Health emergency of international concern".

Traditionally, the spread of infectious diseases was seen in abundance among the poor and people in vulnerable living conditions. For the first time, Covid 19 has broken the myth by infecting largely the affluent classes and international travellers in the first instance. The people tested positive for Covid-19 were largely celebrities, athletes, politicians and white - collared professionals across the globe and those who have a foreign travel history.

So declared as a pandemic on March 11th 2020 by World Health Organisation, Covid 19 has hit the globe in various ways from health and educational sector to national economy, from trade to entertainment and from agriculture sector to tourism, the infectious disease has successfully infected human health as well as all the sectors on which economy depend.

The very impact of this deadly virus can be estimated from the fact such that USA lost more lives, more than the lives it lost in the Vietnam war. The shock to global economy by Corona virus was considered much more severe and faster than the 2008 Global Financial Crisis or even the Great Depression of the 1930s.

It is quite clear that Covid-19 has caused major problems on global, national as well as regional levels, it has caused a global recession and increase the rate of Unemployment.

In this scenario we can say that the worst affected industry due to the COVID-19 is tourism industry everywhere in the world and Indian tourism industry is no exception to this. The ripples of the COVID-19 keep threatening people's health and life. Global and domestic Governments have imposed different levels and sanctions on their citizens including travel bans, restrict gatherings, stay home orders, self-quarantine and other business closures and time - specific restraints. The countries whose economies are hospitality- based have felt a significant negative impact on their economies as travel, tourism and services such as aviation have come to a halt. The hardest hit sector of all is travel and tourism because of partial and full lockdown situations worldwide. The travel and tourism industry and other associated sectors have fallen to a small fraction compared to what they contributed in pre Covid 19 times. Where other sectors like health, education, public transport, media and hospitality are starting to reopen following standard operating procedure(SOPs) of covid-19, but the travel and tourism sector was at halt for longer time due to its fragility to the whims of the virus.

The pandemic has not only affected economically but as well as politically and socially (Cohen2020). As the number of infected cases rising throughout the country and with the implementation of certain measures and campaigns like social distancing, community lock downs, work from home, stay at home, self or mandatory quarantine, curbs on crowding, etc pressure is created for halting the tourism industry and business(Sigala,2020; Gretzel et.al2020).

Further it has been estimated that, there is a drop of international tourist of about 78% causing a loss in employment revenue of US dollar 1.2 trillion and representing the

largest decline in the tourism job cuts which is about 7 times the impact of the 9/11 incident (Tsionas,2020).

Global tourism is affected by many types of disruptive events such as terrorist attack like 9/11 epidemic outbreaks like SARS-Co-V2, MERS-CoV, Ebola, Swine flu, etc. in the past (Wen et al.2020). However, the recent epidemic outbreak (Covid 19) originated from Wuhan, China has severely impacted almost every industry including tourism worldwide (Yeh, 2020).

One of the greatest losses experienced by Government of India is in terms of Foreign Exchange Earnings from tourism. As tourism is one of the major sources of revenue for the Government of India as India is one of the favoured destinations for the tourists all over the country. Foreign exchange earnings are the revenue generated by inbound foreign tourist and decrease in foreign tourist during Covid 19 leads to reduction in revenue earnings. The entire world was affected by Covid-19, including India following the border closure, cancellation of international flights and series of lockdowns, the tourist arrival rate in India has been highly affected. This is a major setback for the Indian economy.

Tourism is a major source of revenue and employment in our country. It is generator for employment, income, money, output and tax collection apart from earning precious foreign exchange. Fall in the tourist arrival rate by 68% from February to March 2020 and hence fall in foreign exchange earnings by 66.32% which has a significant impact on the economy (Statista,2020).

The tourism industry's subsectors have also taken bad hits, including industries of aviation, road transportation, recreation, accommodation and the food supply chain. The Indian tourist industry has created about 87.5 million jobs, with 12.75% of total employment thereby contributing INR 194 billion to India's GDP (WTTC,2018). Moreover, the sector recorded a 3.2% growth from 2018,with 10.8 million foreign tourists arriving in India with a foreign exchange earnings of USD 29.9 billion in 2019.In this regard India ranked 8th for total direct travel and contribution towards tourism of about USD 108 billion (FICCI, 2020).

But during Covid 19 due to the loss witnessed by the tourist sector, there is massive rise in unemployment and the future of this industry was seems to be very uncertain. It has created very negative impact on mental health of people dependent on Tourist sector. This leads to fall in purchasing power , fall in demand, which has created vicious circle of fall in output , investment and subsequently fall in profit .

Dogra Twinkle (2020) explained the impact of Covid-19 on tourism industry and found out that it has been internal and external shocks that weakened the sector. With GDP decreased jobs being lost. Due to lockdown, India stopped around 80 countries to enter in India and this has stopped the tourist arrival in India .Around 70 % of the workforce lost their jobs or given unpaid leave till pandemic persist. Post pandemic every part of tourism industry needs to be careful with hygiene and customer. Governments Digi Yatra is also helpful in this case as it helps tourists with face recognition, entry and exist and to get checks from various check points. If state governments want that tourism should be started as earlier pre- Covid era that they should follow strict guidelines of Central Government.

Chitra Guha and Mandhup K Gandhi (2020), study reflects the light that Covid-19 pandemic has not only given the economic burden to tourism industry but also washed away local communities whose major earnings were dependent on tourism. A drastic drop is noticed in tourism industry and majorly affected parts of the country as well as their local communities has stopped earnings. To boost up the sector the paper suggests that stakeholders should invest more in the sector and products of local communities. The short term measure should be provided financial support to the sector so that rebuilding starts soon and long term measure should be to create flexibility for crisis management.

So overall views reflect how tourism sector is badly heated during Covid 19 pandemic.

Some of the challenges faced by tourism sector after pandemic are:

1. Social distancing
2. Health information, vaccination details and RTPCR test reports.
3. Hygiene and Sanitation regulations to be followed
4. Precautions to be followed during travelling

To rebuild the sector is a major challenge. The sector expects financial health and support from Government. Better functioning of the tourism sector is crucial for the overall growth of the economy in general.

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