

Tourism Status and Constraints: A Study of Simraungadh, Bara District, Nepal

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Abstract

The paper entitled tourism opportunities and constraints in Nepal contains a very few aspects of Simraungadh but carries a very high possibilities to increase the national development from economic prospects. It tends to explain the status of tourism in Simraungadh. Despite having all the potentialities required for a tourist destination, Simraungadh has not been able to gain popularity. Thus, it tries to focus on tourism potential and prevailing constraints and what factors have hindered the tourism expansion in Simraungadh and also focuses on figuring out the areas for improvement to increase the number of tourists.

To develop Madhesh and to know history of the same region, different spectrum of tourists uphold to proceed overall enhancement to get stepwise development. Tourism in Nepal has been one of the modern means of earning livelihood for the people and exchange of culture. Every place in Nepal has been conferred upon with historical, natural scenic beauties and cultural diversities. The entire country has high potential for tourism promotion whether it is for ecotourism or cultural tourism. Thus, it becomes obvious that history, culture and exchange of ideas is supreme interest to international communities. It is one of the newly emerging destinations of Nepal in the form of community-based tourism which reserves a splendid variety of natural and socio-cultural diversity crammed in its small area.

Keywords: Village Tourism, economy, development, local people involvement and archaeology,

1. Introduction

Tourism is travel for recreational, leisure and business purposes. According to the Tourism Society of England, 'Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes.' Similarly, Hunziker and Krapf (1942) defined tourism as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising

from the travel and stay of non-residents, insofar as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity”.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, tourism is a business of providing accommodation and services by the host country to the people/guests visiting a place. Tourism involves a complex set of interrelationships between people, places and products (Collier, 1989). The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who “travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four (24) hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity enumerated from within the place visited” (WTO, 1994).

The word ‘Tourism’ is derived from the French word ‘Tourisme’ which originated in the 19th century. Humankind has the desire to travel, to visit exotic places and to encounter different cultures since immemorial (Bhatt, 2006). Tourism is synonym to travelling that brings change for the humans meeting their inherent need of recreation.

In Nepal, development of modern tourism is a recent process. According to legend, Manjushree who made Kathmandu valley fit for human habitation by cutting the Chovar hill of Kathmandu valley with his sword and there by draining the facilities from within the ancient lake, can be regarded as the first tourist visiting Nepal (Shrestha, 2000). After 1951 modern forms of tourism started in Nepal, when country was opened for the external world. Several initiatives were taken during the initial period in 1950s for the development of tourism as an industry in the country. Basic tourism infrastructures were developed that were essential for the growth of tourism. A full-fledged Ministry of Tourism was created in 1977 to look after the tourism sector holistically. Later on, the Tourism Promotion Committees and the Tourism Council were created in the subsequent years. At present, there is the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation for policy making and monitoring tourism programs; while there is a Government and Private sectors partnership body Nepal Tourism Board for the promotion and development of tourism (Bhatt, 2006). The Nepalese tourism activities consist of ethereal mountain scenery as well as unique brand of synergetic Hindu and Buddhist religious practices. The country is famous for being a historic and scenic paradise for tourists worldwide.

In this context there are several such cultural and religious sites that were identified as the destinations for cultural tourism. Simraungadh in the mid-Madhesh Nepal, is a hilltop town popular for its several features.

Tourism in Simraungadh got started after Nepal rise. Simraungadh is not frequented by business tourists. In the beginning of 11th century, a number of Madheshi merchant families

migrated to Simraungadh from Bhaktapur, in the Kathmandu valley. The exact years during which the preliminary migration began were not yet documented. According to the two family trees that were prepared recently the first persons to move from Bhaktapur lived at least generations ago. This new influx marked the beginning of major change in subsistence patterns, and absorption of new cultural patterns and traditions into the community which brought a transformation of a rural hill village into a thriving trade center (Shrestha, 2008). In 1968, when the district headquarters of Simraungadh was shifted to Kalaiya, its economic importance began to decline. It was shadowed by the national economy when the Mahendra Highway was completed. After that most of the Madheshi of Simraungadh have shifted their business and migrated to the highway centers like Lahan, Chapur, Harion and particularly Birgunj. But after the 1990s both domestic and international tourists started visiting Simraungadh for educational and research purposes.

Simraungadh is an ancient Madheshi town which is rich in socio-cultural diversity. It is surrounded by abundant ancient houses, temples of great significance and architecture. All neighboring villages inhabited by the Sah (Vaishya), Ahir, Brahmins, Chhetris, Chamar and Dom contribute to the cultural diversity of region.

Village Tourism in Nepal

In Nepal, the term village tourism has come up in the recent years as another not clearly defined concept. To some people village tourism means any form of tourism that has a village or rural areas as destinations. Others feel that the involvement of the local community in this type of tourism, the economic benefits for the community and the minimization of negative social, cultural and environmental impact should be included in the concept.

According to Nepal Trade Report (2005), "The concept of village tourism has been introduced by Pradhanang for the first time and began to gain recognition as a subject of topic since the start of 1979". Kathmandu Research Center undertook a comprehensive survey on the possibilities of village tourism in Nepal. Nepalese media formally presented the concept of village tourism in public in 1992. After a long struggle the government of Nepal finally included village tourism into its Tourism policy in 1995. (Pradhanang, 2009)

The 1995 Tourism Policy seeks to encourage more foreign exchange earnings, develop regional balance and emphasis the promotion of village tourism. Furthermore, tourist activities would be extended in the villages on the basis of potential of tourism. (Pradhanang, 2009)

From the standpoint of productivity in tourism sector the following important are given below:

- i) To expand the tourism industry and tourism activities which would help to erase poverty and raise the living standard of people
- ii) To promote environmental, historical and cultural heritage and raise the quality of services and facilities related to tourism.
- iii) To make efforts for the creation of stable development within the tourism industry and link it to other economic sectors in a coordinated manner.

The prime objectives of the Ninth Plan (1992-2002) show that tourism has been taken as the basic lead factor of the country. A more liberty tourism policy would be taken to encourage domestic and foreign investors. Emphasis was given to attract a lot of tourism and to encourage them to spend more in the country by increasing their average length of stay. The plan also mentioned developing 14 model tourist villages in different regions. The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) has given continuity to the concept of village tourism with its declared policy of poverty alleviation. The Three Years Interim Plan (2007-2010) has also spelt out various rural development programs and policies to be completed within the time frame.

Tourism Products and Services of Simraungadh

Tourism has been a beneficial field for the income of foreign currency in Nepal. However, instead of flourishing, the tourism industry is diminishing day by day. It is not that there is a lack of attraction points for tourists, but due to certain factors we are compelled to accept the fact without hesitation. Simraungadh is known as a Mini heaven in the Bara District central region of Nepal. Simraungadh was the headquarters of Kalaiya, Bara district. Varieties of ethnic castes and cultures can be found here. Mostly, the Madheshis, Brahmins, Ahir, Dalit, etc. are found in the village. They live in a combined community. They have their own rites and rituals.

Tourists visit Simraungadh for the Chure range to the north. A number of Chure peaks can be viewed from Simraungadh. There are several spots which the visitors cannot avoid visiting after reaching Simraungadh.

The important tourism attractions in Simraungadh and its surrounding areas are:

- i) The Plains to the South
- ii) The Kankalini Temple
- iii) The Chure

The temples devoted to goddesses and gods namely Bindhybasini, Mahalaxmi.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in Nepal. It is the largest source of foreign exchange and revenue. Simraungadh is a tourists' paradise. This place offers varieties of attractions to the visitors. Despite having all the essential components necessary for any tourist destination, Simraungadh is not able to bring more tourists into visit. Also Simraungadh is near to the popular tourist destinations of Nepal such as Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan, yet it is not as flourished as these places. Thus, realizing this dilemma, the study aims to explore the constraints to tourism development in Simraungadh from the perspectives of both tourists and the local people, and how it may expand its activities to attract more tourists.

Tourism is related to travelling, and travelling is naturally a human character. Man needs change and travel provides the change. The American writer, Mark Twain, has aptly said that even heaven can be boring after a while. Travel has had a fascination for man. The primary motive for their travel was trade commerce or pilgrimage or to explore. So, tourism is related to the movement of people from one place to another in leisure time for the purpose of getting pleasure. Tourism is a service industry operated to facilitate the tour for the tourists which is directly related to satisfaction and human behaviour (Shrestha, 2008)

Nepal has the most favorable conditions visitors and the sojourn of foreigners. Everybody agrees that its tourist potential is immense and varied, as the country after a great choice of attractive possibilities which always answer the renewed demand of modern international travelers. Foreign visitors want novelty and Nepal which has so long kept out of the traditional currents of world events, constitutes a new and special attraction? Owing to its very isolation, its remote character has an unrivalled charm and appeal which is irresistible. (Satyal, 2000)

The official records do not indicate any planned approach regarding tourism till 1950. First study regarding tourism potential of the country was assessed in 1990s with the technical assistance from the French Government with the publication of "General plan for the organization of Tourism in Nepal." Having realized the importance of tourism as a major source of foreign exchange earnings, emphasis was given to promote in Nepal.

It has laid much emphasis on pro-rural tourism because in reality only infrastructure development does not bring in more tourists. Tourism itself becomes instrumental for infrastructure development. In the rural Nepalese context, tourism development has always surpassed infrastructure by certain degrees. The tenth plan seems quite confident to ensure poverty alleviation and balanced regional development through tourism, by giving due

possibility to pro-rural tourism development in addition to foreign currency earnings, growth in employment and benefit to overall economic development.

2. Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyze the benefits and opportunities received by local people from tourism development in Simraungadh
- To explore the prospects and potentials of tourism in Simraungadh

3. Research Methods

A descriptive as well as exploratory research design was applied to analyze the present situation of the study area about the issues of the prospects and challenges for the development of tourism in Simraungadh. The study was conducted mainly on the basis of secondary data. In the study simple random sampling has been adopted. Simraungadh is selected as the study area. Its study is limited to focus development of Nepal through tourism development in late 21st century. It is essential to know each citizen to enhance further all-round development of historical Nepal. Though Simraungadh village has not declared by the Government of Nepal as a model tourist village like Gadhimai, it has lots of potentiality and features that can easily attract tourists. Simraungadh first came into light during the Visit Nepal Year 1998. However, the role of Simraungadh has been always crucial in the path of tourism development in Simraungadh.

For data analysis qualitative was presented. This section is mainly concerned with the analysis and discussion of data collected from the different books. The different sources of data were cited and kept in sequential order according to the need of the study. In this section an analytical study had been conducted with tourists (both domestic and international) who were visiting Simraungadh. The components of the study included mode of transportation, type of accommodation, major attractions and infrastructures.

4. Results and Discussion

Mode of Transportation

Based on the respondents' feedback, the most used mode of transportation was motorbike which was used by many visitors. Many were visiting Simraungadh by archaeology, although Simraungadh is a popular route to know history, culture and archaeological status. Similarly, less visitors were using taxis and most of the tourists were using the local vehicles. Many tourists suggested Simraungadh directly by bus services to and from Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Influence Factors to attract Tourists

The four main factors which attract tourists in Simraungadh were, Accommodation Facilities, Homely Environment, Cultural and Traditional Facilities, and Natural Scenic Beauty. Of these four features, nature and scenic beauties were highly appreciated by many tourists, the homely environment by fifty percent, culture and traditions and accommodation facilities by nearly half tourists. Only a few tourists gave low preferences to accommodation and culture and traditional facilities and a homely environment. Tourists appreciated the medium for the accommodation, facilities, culture and traditions and homely environment.

Tourist Infrastructure

Modern facilities and services are necessary to attract tourists. It shows that study was satisfied with the overall situation of the infrastructure available in Simraungadh. Moreover, they were satisfied with the cleanliness of the place, and the behaviour of the people of Simraungadh. However, when it comes to electricity, street lighting and road conditions the study reflected medium quality. They suggested improvements.

Hotel Owners and Local People

An analytical study has been conducted with hotel owners in October 2024. The components of the study included the capacity of hotels, accommodation price, and favorable season to visit, impacts of tourism and areas of improvement.

Hotels in Simraungadh

Hotel industry plays a dominant role in tourism development. Tourist inflow increased in Simraungadh after the road was constructed from Simraungadh bazar to Kalaiya. Once this road was completed, tourists began to visit Simraungadh gradually. There was a need for hotels and lodges in Simraungadh. With the increase in tourists' activities in Simraungadh the number of hotels and paying guesthouses has grown significantly. Most of the lodges and resort used to give priority to the tourists who like to enjoy the village environment. They were designed in classical architectural and historical style so that tourists would be attracted and at the same time culture would be preserved. Most of them are operated in their own resources and some of them have been operated by people outside of Simraungadh. Majority of the owners were Madheshi.

Accommodation Capacity of Hotels and Guesthouses in Simraungadh

With the increase in the number of tourists, the number of hotels and lodges was also increasing. Of the available accommodations, few were of economic standard such as paying guest houses. Most of the tourists like to stay there in order to enjoy the local culture and traditional way of living and to learn Nepali language.

Favorable Season

Seasons play a vital role in the inflow of tourists in any area. There are two types of seasons in which tourists come to Nepal based on the tourists' arrivals by month: peak (August-November and February-May) and off (June-July, and December-January). The largest number of tourists visit Simraungadh during spring season as during this season the weather is pleasant, and one can enjoy the vista scenic beauty of Terai. Similarly, few visit during winter season, in autumn and in summer.

Impacts of Tourism

Tourism has both positive and negative impacts on the destinations. The changes that occur in Simraungadh due to increase in the number of tourists can be seen from the table below.

The residents of Simraungadh accept that the overall impact of tourism were positive. Majority of the study agreed that the opportunity of employment and services as well as disposal of sewage and cleanliness had highly increased. Most of the study agreed that the opportunity of farming animals, vegetables and fruits has been decreased as most of the goods for the hotels and lodges have been exported from nearby cities like Pokhara and Narayangadh. Similarly, most of the study said that there has been an increase in local business and conservation and promotion of natural and cultural assets. Also, few of the study said that there is a low increment in establishment of traditional cottage industry.

Areas of Improvement for Tourism Promotion

To promote tourism in Simraungadh, all service sectors should be improved. Being at the center of the Bazar area, the information center is usually not opened due to which many complain have come from tourists. This can also affect tourism promotion in Simraungadh. Also a few of the studies explained that there should be improvement in transportation facilities as well as advertising. They also added that it would be easy if there were direct transportation services from either Kathmandu or Pokhara.

Constraints and Weakness

There are sufficient historical, natural and cultural products for the development of tourism in Simraungadh. It had also basic infrastructure facilities. But there are several hindrances to attracting tourists. The main problem that was found during the study was inadequate facilities of lodges, facilities etc. The overall supply of livelihood is insufficient. Even during the rainy season there was shortage of good settlement for few days to the locals. Thus, it was not viable to provide enough facilities to the tourists who use considerably high number of facilities than the locals do. Eventually, the facilities scarcity would hamper the future inflow to tourists in Simraungadh.

Simraungadh is undergoing through the process of modernization. The rampant process of tearing down the traditional buildings and creating concrete buildings gradually decline the historical and cultural values of Simraungadh. Most of the temples and historical objects are showing the effects of time, without proper repair and maintenance these objects will be the matter of history and the future will not have an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of these places.

There is a limited supply of local products for tourists in Simraungadh. Even those fabric items and metal goods were produced locally, they were not available in the markets. These items can be interest for the tourists coming to Simraungadh and on the other hand it can be the source of income for the locals. It has been said that most of the festivals being observed by the locals are in the waning process. Locals are not so keen to revive and maintain the festivals. Vanishing festivals would shorten the stays of tourists.

The local leadership is one of the main issues in Simraungadh. In Kathmandu, there are committees and subcommittees for Tourism, Education, Health and Library. However, coordination of these committees with the local people was not in practice. It is necessary to form subcommittee in Simraungadh as well as there should be active participation of local people for further development of Simraungadh.

There is lack of preservation, conservation and promotion policies or incentives. With the focus of tourism, there is lack of appropriate marketing facilities and lack of marketing of the local products. Transportation facility is not appropriate for the tourists. They are facing problem not getting seat in buses from Simraungadh Bazaar.

5. Conclusion

Simraungadh has a wide and bright prospect of tourism development, which can be actualized to increase the level of income of the local. A few constraints need to be addressed to work towards tourism growth and achieving inclusive economic growth. The development of tourism has both positive and negative impacts. To develop sustainable tourism practices and to minimize negative impacts, the capacity of local communities to manage tourism business and natural resources should be further enhanced.

There is no doubt that tourism benefits both tourists and the local people. If planned well, tourism industry can create demand for locally produced goods and services and raise the living standard of local people by creating off-farm employment and income generating opportunities. Having natural and culturally based resources, Simraungadh has able to attract both domestic and international tourists. Promotion of domestic tourism is the immediate need of tourism industry of Simraungadh so it should not be overlooked.

Domestic tourism helps the local people to involve themselves in income generating activities.

Tourism in Simraungadh can be promoted and developed by developing infrastructures, providing quality services to the tourists at moderate costs, easy access to information, accessible as well as comfortable and reliable transportation and safe travelling environment. Tour packages should be arranged for domestic tourists as well. As most of the international tourists prefer to experience the Real Rural Nepal, futuristic way of tourism development in Simraungadh is in the form of village tourism. This will result in increase in flow of tourists and help local community to drive the tourism activities in a sustainable way.

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