

Assessment of Religio-touristic activities in Haridwar City of Uttarakhand State (India): A SWOT Analysis

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Abstract: Haridwar city has been revered as a sacred place and has been drawing increasing number of pilgrims / tourists year after year. The Pilgrimage season during the festive days has moderate positive impacts on the income of local residents. Besides the positive impacts, some negative socio-cultural impacts i.e. increase in crime, accidents, the degradation of environmental scenario and some other threats to this sector were also observed during this study, which is an attempt to investigate the present condition as well as the future possibilities of Pilgrimage Tourism in Haridwar City.

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Key words: Tourism; Pilgrimage; Solid waste management; Environmental pollution

1. Introduction

According to Hindu mythology, Haridwar is one of the holiest places on account of the belief that the Gods have left their footprints in Haridwar. The holy city of Haridwar is home to some of the most sacred Hindu rituals and one can always see Hindu pilgrims and devotees from round the globe gather at Haridwar to offer prayers on auspicious occasions, having a dip in the sacred Ganga River (**Figure 1**). Not only this, Haridwar stands as a gateway to the other most important pilgrimage spot for Hindu in Uttarakhand i.e. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. The city of Haridwar has a population of 175,000 inhabitants (2001 Census), almost three-fold the number reported for 1961. Over the last 3–4 decades this holy city has witnessed an increase in developmental activities such as industrialization, communication, road construction and educational activities which has led to rapid urbanization and created a high demand for basic infrastructures, including electricity, water supply, food availability, transport and sanitary management. All these activities contribute towards increasing the influx of visitors and permanent settlers in the Haridwar city. Haridwar receive heavy influx of pilgrims round the year but during the festive days this number increase about six time than that of the normal days (**Sharma et.al., 2010**). During the festive occasions, on account of heavy influx of pilgrims, vehicles and mass bathing in river Ganga, pollutants increase in

water and in the ambient atmosphere. The generation of SW also increases manifold on these occasions of sacred bathing days, on the banks of River Ganga (**Mishra and Joshi, 2002; Gangwar and Joshi, 2008**).

2. Materials and Methods

In the present study, SWOT analysis technique was used in order to describe current situation and for the future possibilities of Pilgrimage Tourism in Haridwar City. For the present study, the District Tourism Office was consulted to get the information about the influx of tourist in Haridwar City. The information about civic amenities and waste management were gathered contacting the city municipality. The information regarding the facilities for the pilgrims by the city administration in Haridwar City, was collected through consulting the Tourists and local residents and local shop keepers.

3. Results

The findings indicate that socio-cultural as well as environmental aspects are being affected by the Pilgrimage Tourism in the holy city of Haridwar. There is a scope for Strong Tourism industry, but it needs some managerial steps by the city administration in the betterment of environment through planning of waste management and providing proper civic facilities. Results of the present study are summarized below in Table 1-3.

Table 1: Number of tourists/ Pilgrims visited Haridwar City, during 2008-2009

S.No.	Month	Year-2008			Year-2009		
		Indian	Foreigner	Total	Indian	Foreigner	Total
1.	January	387075	1113	388188	398500	1141	399641
2.	February	443775	1288	445063	449575	1351	450926
3.	March	565500	1961	567461	575775	1863	577638
4.	April	675750	1463	677213	685500	1735	687235
5.	May	895500	1064	896564	910350	1159	911509
6.	June	1415750	835	1416585	1605500	898	1606398
7.	July	1588500	1283	1589783	1635750	1842	1637592
8.	August	1898650	2003	1900653	1945650	2127	1947777
9.	September	925750	1608	927358	978500	1759	980259
10.	October	955750	1775	957525	1025225	2079	1027304
11.	November	878575	1799	880374	950575	1904	952479
12.	December	725675	1662	727337	888550	2109	890659
Grand Total		11356250	17854	11374104	12049450	20067	12069517

Table 2: Available infrastructure and handling capacity of Haridwar Municipality

S.No.	Components	Year-1998	Year-2009
1.	Tractor Trolley	4	15
2.	Container carrier	3	5
3.	Tipper Truck	3	7
4.	Sewer Jetting Machine	1	2
5.	Sewer Cleaning Machine	3	5
6.	Total Waste Collection/ Day	101 M. T.	250 M. T.
7.	Modern Techniques for Waste disposal	Not Available	Not Available

Table 3: SWOT analysis of Tourism in Haridwar City

SWOT [S=Strengths, W=Weakness, O=Opportunities, T= Threats]	
Strengths:	World heritage Sacred River Ganga Various holy temples/places within the city Various festivals or fairs throughout the year. Hospitable people Adequacy of transport facilities and interstate connectivity. World famous Rajaji National Park Industrial Township i.e., SIDCUL Gurukula Kangri University: A Centre of Vaidic studies.
Weaknesses:	Inadequacy of information channels. Inadequacy of marketing. Lack of adequate infrastructural support. Lack of civic facilities. Improper environmental management.
Opportunities:	To provide Eco- tourism. Newer sources of communication like the internet must be used effectively to influence and advertise. Opportunities of employment. Scope to develop an inter-religious philosophies prevails.
Threats:	Location for exchange of communicable diseases. Loss of Bio-diversity. Degradation of Environment. Danger of stampede during main festive occasions. Physico-economical stress over local residents.

4. Discussion

Haridwar city has been well regarded as one of the holiest places and has been drawing increasing number of pilgrims / tourists regularly. Influx of pilgrims bestows innumerable socio-economic benefits to the region. The festive occasions offer an exclusive time to local businessmen to acquire a lot of financial benefits, as **Libison and Muraleedharan (2008)** pointed out the high positive effects of pilgrimage season on income, employment and standard of living of local residents in Pandalam rural locality.

On the other hand, millions of devotees and visitors, take a dip in the holiest river Ganga during Kanwar, Ardh-Kumbh, Kumbh and other festive occasions. It is a fact that no municipality can make effective and foolproof arrangements for lodging and various other civic facilities under rapid movement of such a massive number of pilgrims. As a consequence, the available places, grounds, fields and riparian city forest areas are used as latrines and toilets. The municipal water points turn as quick wash places. The pilgrims also bring a lot of offering in the form of flowers, cloths, immense and old icons of Gods and Goddess, besides last remains (ashes) of their loved ones- to dispose in the river Ganga, at Haridwar. During these festive occasions, the solid waste management and sanitation problems are worsened considerably (**Figure 2**), creating an unpleasant scenario of littered SW attracting stray dogs and pigs as earlier reported by **Sharma et.al. (2010)**.

This unsanitary condition leads to an increased number of cases of various contagious as well as

water and air borne diseases, as observed in a study during Kanwar fair at Haridwar in 2008 (**Saini et al., 2009**) (**Figure 3**). This certainly needs attention of city administration as also pointed out by **Akca (2006)** in case of Rural Tourism management in Turkey. Improper dumping of waste leads to pollution and conveys a bad impression for tourists visiting the holy city of Haridwar as pointed out by **Shanker and Joshi (1997)**. Lack of management certainly disappoints the visitors, which creates a barrier in promotion of tourism industry as **Alegre and Garau (2010)** has pointed out that the success of any type of Tourism industry depends on the satisfaction of tourists (**Figure 4**).

Additionally, many industries have been set up with the establishment of State Infrastructure and Industrial Council of Uttaranchal (SIDCUL) in adjoining areas. With rapid industrialization in the said area, human pressure and environmental deterioration have taken place. The problem of traffic management takes place seriously due to a casual attitude of people which most of times increased traffic jam and noise pollution (**Sharma et al., 2010**). During the peak season for the tourists, vehicles passes through Chilla range of world famous Rajaji National Park to manage the traffic congestion, which is adversely affecting to ambient air and noise, physically as well as chemically in and around Haridwar city.

Therefore, it is needed to make an appropriate strategy to handle the problems in Haridwar city and to make Pilgrimage tourism to Eco-Pilgrimage.

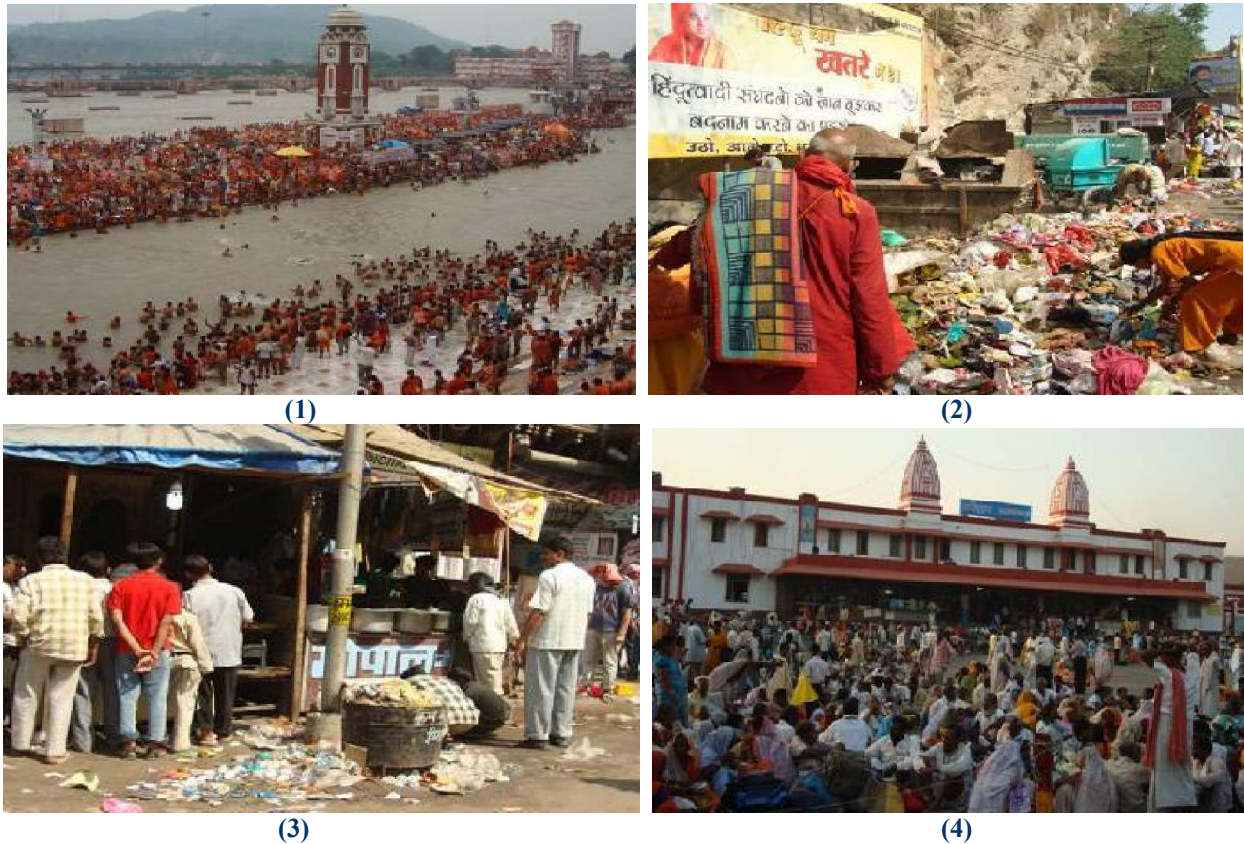


Figure 1: Pilgrims taking a holy dip in Ganga River at Ghat / Platform of Har-Ki-Pauri in Haridwar City, 2: A Pile of Solid waste nearby the Har-Ki-Pauri area, 3: Solid waste near Dhaba / Restaurant in the city: An open invitation for communicable diseases, 4: Pilgrims compelled to rest on ground due to insufficient management at Haridwar Railway Station.

5. Conclusion

Findings indicate that tourism in Haridwar City has both positive and negative impacts on socio-cultural as well as environmental aspects within the holy city of Haridwar. This can be easily understood by following.

(A) Positive impact: Some of the positive socio-cultural impacts include income generation and employment opportunities for local people. In the region the infrastructure development such as roads, hotels, lodges and helicopter services upgrading day by day, the improvement of social services such as banking, health, tele-communications is improving very fast during last few years. Civic and local administration is turning more considerate and open minded towards local issues and related problems. New technologies and life style advancements are being added at various levels. Local businessmen are enhancing the varieties according to the fashion and trend.

(B) Negative impact: The negative socio-cultural impacts are being realized by way of increase in crimes, accidents and loss of cultural heritage of the concern area. During main festive occasions, cases of water borne diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, jaundice, typhoid, cholera, and many other types of liver and Gastro Intestinal disorders increase due to burden on civic facilities, on account of enhanced pressure of Tourists/ Pilgrims.

The pilgrims also bring a lot of offering in the form of flowers, cloths, old icons of Gods and Goddess, besides last remains (ashes) of their loved ones- to dispose in the river Ganga, at Haridwar. The middle section of Haridwar city turns into a giant cesspool of solid and semi solid waste material, including the night soil, the human faecal matter. During the peak period of monsoon, much of this human faecal matter gets its way to the holy Ganga and its canal- simultaneously being used by the same millions of pilgrims and partly by the local residents too. During the festive occasions, the residents of this

city face the problem of noise pollution due to the use of loudy horns, CD Players, heavy sound systems by the pilgrims. During the main festive days viz. Kanwar, Ardh-Kumbh and Kumbh etc. the daily need products like milk, vegetables, fruits and flowers are supplied to Ashrams, Math, other social organizations, hotels and restaurants on high prices.

Therefore, local people suffer on account of price rise of daily needy items, due to scarcity of the commodities. This article argues that tourism needs to be sensitive to local cultural norms and beliefs for it to be accepted by local people and to promote sustainable development. This is possible if all the stakeholders (government, operators and local people) collaborate in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. The appropriate strategy can minimize the negative cultural impacts and promotes the Eco-Pilgrimage in Haridwar.

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