

## Cultural Tourism in Pakistan: Prospects and Challenges

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### Abstract

This research study examined the state of cultural tourism in Pakistan as well as the consequences of cultural tourism with detail were also explored. The prospects for promoting tourism in the country as well as challenges faced in this regard were also been studied in this article. The current study also discussed the strategies which may be used for the betterment and promotion of tourism. The study was done by using the qualitative content analysis technique. The study is concluded as that Pakistan has a vast range of prospects for cultural, religious, adventures, and other types of tourism in the country and can be promoted by using the heritage of ancient times as well as medieval periods. The archeological archaeological perspectives (material and non-material cultural aspects) of ancient and medieval societies are the heritage of Pakistan and it may be used for the promotion of tourist activities in the country. The study also presented a view that international as well as domestic tourists have to face number of difficulties and challenges which must be addressed and resolved on priority bases. The departments and authorities concerned with the tourism industry must address difficulties faced by tourists and has to resolve the issue on priority bases.

**Keywords:** *cultural tourism, prospects, heritage, medieval periods, ancient times*

### Introduction:

The Tourism industry has significant and imperative role for strengthening the economy of various countries. It may also provide employment probabilities, economic solidification, improving infrastructure and developing monetary stability. It can also be used for systemizing the mechanism of travelling and journeys as well as preserving and shielding the environmental position of the respective area (Kakar, 2007). The studies defined that “tourists usually travel to see different places and things like different climates, nature, cultures, people, customs, arts, cuisines, languages, unique festivals, old historical buildings and sites etc.” The tourism experts

explained that Pakistan had countless and excessive prospects for cultural tourism. It had great heritage sites from ancient to modern civilizations. The areas in the Pakistani territory had witnessed various unique cultures. The studies elucidated the scenario as, “Pakistani areas had huge potential of tourism due to its unique cultural position, distinctive customs, various and interesting languages, climate peculiarity, exclusive arts and craft. The experts mentioned this position as that reason why Pakistan has a great potential in tourism industry is that it possess every single things that could meet the demand of visitors” (Haque, 2015). There are various aspects of tourism which needed to study and explored including cultural tourism. Pakistan is enriched with various ancient to modern cultures and civilizations in all its parts and all have the interaction for their love-ones. The study “cultural tourism in Pakistan, its prospects, challenges and strategies for promotion” needed a detailed review on different aspects, especially to explore the challenges and elucidated the promotional strategies. The study was done by using the content analysis method of research. Various primary as well as secondary sources were analyzed to having in-depth information about the phenomenon under study.

### **Literature Review**

Abbasi (2021) explored the cultural, religious, archeological, heritage, leisure and adventures tourism in Pakistani area. It presented detailed view of tourism accomplishments in country and discussed its pros and cons, benefits, challenges and different types of the touristic activities in the country. It gave view as, “there are different sects of Buddhism, its religious teachings, Gandhara center of Buddhist activities, and religious scriptures and sculptures of Buddha which presented cultural, religious as well as heritage spectrum of tourism in the area. It also discussed about the details of various Buddhist points like Taxila, Mohra Muradu, Jandial, Mankiala, Takht-i-Bahi, Nimogram Buddhist Complex, and Stupa of Gharasa (Dangram) as important points of cultural and heritage tourism”.

Hasan (2013) presented view about Buddhism heritage sites in Pakistani areas which also represent the culture of that time period. It deliberated about historic outlook of Gandhara culture, Buddhist ethos and various other aspects of that time period. It presented topographical magnitude of Gandhara civilization as well as advent of Buddhist culture in the areas which are part of Pakistan in modern days. The manuscript also presented beliefs of Buddhist people, Jataka tiers and episode of Buddha life. This book also offered pictorial view of sculptures Stupas found in different sites in KPK, Pakistan. The book was written about architectural sites of Gandhara time

period. The manuscript gave detailed view of Gandhara culture and heritage in the area but neglects historical and tourist importance of these sites.

### **Tourism in Pakistan**

There is huge potential of tourism in Pakistan as the country is culturally rich and diverse ranges of tourist destinations for international as well as domestic tourists enriched the region. Studies presented view that “Pakistan is home of some of the oldest civilizations of the world, and has innumerable locations of scenic beauty, world’s highest mountains, many religious and historic places, unique arts and crafts and a rich culture and heritage. Pakistan is endowed with immense geographical beauty with an equally rich and diverse tapestry of cultural heritage in every province. Notwithstanding that, for a host of factors, the performance and state of tourism in the country is much lower than its potential, especially if compared to similar countries. Direct contribution of tourism towards Pakistan’s GDP was PKR 793.0 Billion in 2016, this is equivalent to 2.7% of GDP, which is a mere fraction of the sector’s potential. Now that tourism is a provincial subject, and there is need to formulate an effective and efficient institutional framework to unravel the tourism potential of the province to the fullest, by the provincial government. So that the cultural and heritage tourism may be enhanced and provincial as well as country’s economic situation would be stable” (Government, 2017; Manzo, 2016; Ghaus, 2016).

Not only has a single area of the country but all four province has wide range of tourist loving points. From ancient heritage to modern adventures ranges, the country is full of tourist loving zones which attract all level nature lovers. The scholars appraise the country in this regard as that Pakistan naturally has one of inimitable and productive assemblage of magnificent and Rocky Mountains, sumptuous fields, range of rivers, deserts, seashores, a number of lakes, and landscapes augmented with sociable, hospitable and responsive people which consequently making it heavenly, delightful and fantastic destination for tourist having different taste to travel. It is also stated as mountainous ranges of northern side of the country like Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and Great Himalaya had solidest concentrations with high peaks of world. Pakistani northern areas had been appraised as, “Pakistan is known in the world of tourism because of the Kalam (Swat valley) which is known as the Switzerland of Asia. The Hunza and Chitral valleys were the home to a small pre-Islamic animist Kalasha community who claim descent from the army of Alexander the Great (Munir, 2017). Haque, (2015) also appraised the Pakistani tourist sites as, the historical and archaeological sites of Gandhara and Indus Valley like Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Taxila; architecture of Mughal Empire and architectural as well as cultural heritage of Sikh Emperors are

few examples of heritage diversities in Pakistan. The multicultural nature of the country also contributes to the tourism industry in the way that it offers various traditions, customs and festivals for the tourists to explore and enjoy.

Pakistan is country which had multi-cultural heritage from ancient to medieval times and it has witnessed number of dynasties from early Bronze ages, Indus Valley civilization, Vedic time period, Gandhara and Buddhist rise to downfall in the area. It has great attraction for nature lovers and heritage tourists as well. It has also been stated by the scholars as, Pakistani tourism industry has many strengths and potentials, for example, it possesses nature, highest mountains, archaeological and architect sites, amazing culture, tasty foods, festivals throughout the seasons, handicrafts, rich natural resources along with four seasons to explore. The tourism in Pakistan is still cheap for the foreigners comparing to its adjoining areas, as one US dollar has value more than 200 Pakistani rupees. Pakistan has hotels and restaurants ranging in quality and price from lowest or guest paid houses to highest quality and price like Marriott, Holiday Inn, Sheraton, Serena Centurus Islamabad worlds second seven star hotel, etc. similarly the tourists can enjoy local to international high quality and price food chains like KFC, Mc Donald's, Pizza Hut, Burger King etc. Shopping in Pakistan is quite cheap for foreigners as they love to shop for leather items, handmade carpets, decoration items, Pashmina shawls, embroidered shirts/shoes, gems and jewelry etc." (Punjab, 2016).

Tourism has various aspects including cultural, heritage, adventures, pilgrimage etc. Besides architecture masterpieces and archaeological sites as well as Mughal and British antecedents, Pakistani festivals and cuisines are interesting portion of ironic culture of the area. The studies presented an attractive face of Pakistan in regard to tourism spectrum as, "the food streets had become foremost source of attraction for tourists as they can enjoy the local Pakistani food as well as the colorful streets and people shopping in the markets and bazars at the same time. Festivals tend to provide celebration, joy, mental and physical refreshment to not only local people but also the tourists who come with the aim to explore and enjoy different cultures and festivals. Some of the famous cultural ceremonies and festivals of Pakistan include *Lok Virsa Mela*, Horse and cattle shows, Basant or kite flying, Festival of lamps Northern areas festivals including the famous, Kalash festivals, Silk route festivals etc." (Punjab, 2017).

The region where is Pakistan situated has an exclusive and significant aspect of architecture. The studies mentioned that Pakistan has various cultural identities including Buddhist, Jains, Gandhara's, Sikhs as well as early and later Bronze age civilizations, Vedic and

medieval societies; thus it's not surprising that majority of ancient and medieval artifacts, relics of religious personalities, military themes and literature about societal structure are attractive for the tourists belongs to the different parts of the world (Bricker, (2017). Singh (2017) describes as that, there is lot of attraction for the Sikhs in heritage and culture in Pakistani areas. There are number of architectural places in Pakistan which are precious for the Sikhs and Hindus as well. Although they are limited in numbers but Sikh festivals Vasakhi and Hola Mohallah are celebrated in Pakistan and huge number of Sikhs participated around the world.

### **State of Cultural Tourism**

In terms numbers, the international tourism to Pakistani areas is in low density, which is also cause for the cheap level of substantial foreign exchange earnings by this sector that is also lower than other countries of the area like India, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, even Iran. There are several reasons of low level of international tourism and which have to address at all. Though, increasing domestic tourism can also play important role for the development of travelling sector. The domestic travel outlay is geographic distribution of expenditure; it may impact local communities positively in case of Northern Areas. Mahmood (2000) presented a view in this regard as, "there are number of cultural tourism perspectives in Pakistan, especially the Sikh heritage and cultural aspects in the Punjab are catchy for Sikh community around the world. The heritage and culture related activities may boost business of tourism sector, if it properly managed".

The linkage of cultural tourism with professionals, businesses and industrial activities may emolument striking shares in terms of producing job opportunities, hospitality services sector, travelling field as well as tolls and direct taxes. But the tourism master plan Punjab showed that there is just thirteen percent of international arrival may be classified as tourists that is lower than all other countries of the region (Mahmood, 2000). It is estimated that increase in cultural tourism can thus expand job creation in diverse level of tourism industry monetary system in the country.

*There is another different group who visits historical places or participated in the cultural festivals by traveling from abroad but not be called tourists in strictly meanings. These are overseas Pakistanis and travel back to homeland for visiting the country but don't show them tourist (Ghause, 2017). In fact they financially supported the country but their effort is not counted in tourism economy. The studies*

*presented a picture about the role of overseas Pakistanis in tourism as, “overseas form a group who, if effectively targeted, can greatly increase tourism dollar input into the local economy. The experts considered them silent tourists, which may visit the sites of their interest but could not be mentioned as international tourists. These overseas Pakistanis are the key part of the tourism activities may be considered international tourists and their activities should be counted in this category but still there is need to study this point in broader perspective” (Punjab 2016).*

The studies interlinked the tourism and economic sector as, “the promotion of the international tourism is directly linked with the local economical strengthening. As the international tourism increased the local activities are developed and benefits for local communities increased. The studies presented a view that major part of the tourists’ dollar is spent on basic services such as accommodation, meals and local transport, with obvious benefits to the local community. Presently, however, entertainment accounts for an infinitesimal share (7%) of this contribution (Mahmood, 2000). It is further elaborated as, As far as poverty alleviation at the grass roots level is concerned, this share which should include cultural activities has the potential to increase significantly. Retail shopping is another area which, at 32%, can include crafts, cultural replicas and quality souvenirs and thus accrue benefits to crafts persons and small scale artisans (Khalil, Kakar, & Waliulla, 2007).

There is not all is well in tourism sector but it has a dark side too. The studies have shown a tragic outlook regarding cultural tourism in Pakistani areas and described in lower sort due to deficiency of operative collaboration among curators of cultural heritage and tourism sector officials. Although, PTDC and TDCP working for promoting the heritage tourism but it is done without involvement of Federal Archaeology Department and other cultural heritage management agencies. The reports clearly showed that linkage between heritage preservation departments and tourism development sector is huge deficiency of Pakistani system (Breines, 2012).

### **Challenges to Promote Cultural Tourism**

There are number of issues and challenges which are hurdling into promotion of cultural tourism in Pakistan. There is need to resolve the issue for the development of cultural Tourism in Pakistan.

### **Religious Value of Cultural Sites**

The studies presented a view that the Sikh and Buddhist cultural sites are also having significant religious importance for their believers. The religious value of cultural places cannot be removed from them but their religious significance and value make attentive to the religious orthodox and stunned them for the promotional activities of other religions. But ignoring the religious contention can be helpful to promote the cultural in the country.

### **Absence of Tourism Management Entity at Federal Level**

The abolishment of the federal Ministry of Tourism as a result of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment led to a huge gap in addressing issues related to tourism sector development. Certain critical issues such as building the country's image, resolving difficulty in issuance of the Pakistani visa, dealing with overall security situation, assurance of quality and service standard in the Tourism Sector etc., need to be dealt at the national level. Some other issues, like coordination to travel to different sites and places around the country can also be managed just by a federal authority which has roots in all the areas of the country.

### **Low Priority to Tourism Sector**

The policy space has been weak and institutional structures have been evolving since 1972. Successive governments have failed to make the required investments or attract private investors to establish any major tourist attractions. For example, in Punjab the Information & Culture Department has a meager financial allocation of only PKR 400 million out of PKR 550 billion portfolio.

### **Lack of Provincial Tourism Policy Framework**

At present, there is no policy or planning framework in place to guide growth and investment of tourism in Punjab. The last tourism policy was formulated in 1991. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the only province to have formulated a tourism policy post 18th amendment, devolution that made tourism a provincial subject.

**Security and Safety of Tourists**

Over the last two decades, Pakistan has suffered immensely as a consequence of a deteriorating security environment brought about due to insurgencies and terrorism. This has created a negative perception, fear and distrust in the security and safety situation of the country across the world. The federation and the provinces have failed to counter this negative perception. As a consequence Pakistan has had adverse travel advisories and foreign visitors have consequently avoided traveling to the country.

**Difficulty in Issuance of Visa**

Due to uncertain security and a volatile geopolitical situation, tourists do not easily get Pakistani visas. The issue gets even more severe when entry into Pakistan is from India, which restricts thousands of tourists from coming to Pakistan.

**Lack of Inter-Departmental Coordination**

Several departments such as environment, wild life, forestry, road and highways, border control, police etc. need to work closely and in a coordinated manner to support tourism activities. Lack of interdepartmental and interprovincial coordination has been an endemic issue that has obstructed effective policy implementation in Pakistan.

**Government Departments focused only on Revenue Generation**

At present, the key provincial tourism management organization, the TDCP, is mainly engaged in running commercial businesses. It runs most of its own motels. It also operates tours via its offices in Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Rawalpindi and Murree. Hence, the government plays the role of a competitor, rather than a facilitator and regulator of the private sector. TDCP, like the Pakistan Tourism Development Center (PTDC), has moved away from its prime of developing the tourism sector and facilitating private sector investment towards revenue generation.

**Lack of Private Investment in Tourism Sector**

Although the federal government and provincial governments have worked on galvanizing public–private partnerships (PPPs) for several years, they have failed to operationalize any significant investments and no major joint venture in the tourism sector has emerged.

### **Lack of Proper Enforcement of Standards and Certifications**

Enforcement of standards is now the responsibility of the Department of Tourist Services (DTS), a provincial responsibility following the devolution. This is implemented through three Acts of Parliament; (i) The Pakistan Hotels and Restaurants Act 1976; (ii) The Pakistan Tourist Guides Act 1976 and; (iii) The Travel Agencies Act 1976. However, while these laws do exist in theory, implementation has been weak.

### **Inadequate Capacity of the DTS**

The responsibility of managing standards of hotels and regulating hotels, tourist guides and travel agencies lies with Provincial Department of Tourist Services (DTS). Prior to devolution DTS worked under the Federal Ministry of Tourism but after 18th amended it now operates under the provincial Tourism Department but remains unable to implement and ensure quality of tourist services. Accreditation of hotels is not credible whereas certification of tourist guides is weakly implemented. Information on tours and tourists' guides remains scanty and inadequate. There is also no fitness certification implemented for a vehicle hired by the tourists neither is there any standardization of transportation rates between different destinations.

### **Dilapidated Tourism Infrastructure**

Due to a recent history of natural disasters, the tourism sector in many areas has suffered major losses, especially mountainous regions, including physical damage to buildings and equipment and lost businesses. This in turn has taken its toll on availability of tourist facilities in the country. Damage caused to roads, unreliable supply of electricity, poor sanitation at tourist spots, and lack of proper solid waste management has worsened the situation. Moreover, limited conservation and restoration work has been performed at religious and heritage sites and where works have been performed the quality has been a major issue.

### **Lack of Reliable Data and Research in Tourism Sector**

There is a dearth of reliable data on the foreign and domestic tourism. None of the provincial governmental agencies related to the tourism sector maintain any data that reliably documents foreign and domestic tourist traffic for specific destinations. Lack of reliable data thus hampers evidence based policymaking and planning for tourism”.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan has huge potential to promote cultural, heritage and adventures tourism in the country which may also be supported and boosted the financial growth and overall economy. The flow of the capital may also be enhanced by the promotion of the tourist activities but it is still ignored by the concerned officials. The international tourists are reluctant to travel Pakistani areas due to above mentioned challenges and deficiencies in this regard but no serious efforts had been made by the political as well as bureaucratic administration to meet these challenges and also to provide maximum available facilities to international and domestic tourists.

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