

## **EXAMINING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN RELIGIOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE SITE KHATARA SATRA,DARRANG,ASSAM**

Silpi Rani Baruah\*<sup>1</sup>, Dr Malhar Pangrikar<sup>2</sup>, Dr Neha Yadav<sup>3</sup>, Dr Md Yamin Hassan<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Tourism Management, MIT University, Shillong, Meghalaya

<sup>2</sup> Vice Chanellor, MIT University, Shillong, Meghalaya

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Deptment of Marketing Management, FLAME University,

<sup>4</sup> Principal, Cresent College, Guwahati, Assam

### **ABSTRACT**

*Located in Darrang, Assam, Khatara Satra is an important religious and cultural heritage site located at darrang district, Assam .This study looks at what makes tourism there viable. The Vaishnavite tradition of Assam is the foundation of the Satra, which is of great cultural, historical, and theological significance. The site's spiritual and cultural integrity must be protected in order to encourage economic growth and accommodate the growing number of tourists. Infrastructure development, environmental preservation, community involvement, cultural preservation, and government policies are some of the important issues that are examined. Local communities have a crucial role in protecting history, and the study stresses the significance of striking a balance between tourist development and environmental and cultural sustainability. The research indicates that in order to keep Khatara Satra open for religious pilgrims and cultural heritage seekers for the foreseeable future, responsible tourist practices and good management are crucial.*

## INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is a form of tourism motivated, partly or wholly by religious sentiments. Religious tourism is a form of travel in which the primary objective is to engage with religious beliefs, practices, or experiences. Religious tourism is a practice in which individuals visit sacred sites, participate in religious events, or deepen their faith. This form of tourism may be driven by a desire for spiritual development, the fulfilment of religious obligations, or the desire to appreciate the cultural and historical significance of religious sites. For instance, Muslims may undertake pilgrimages to Mecca, Catholics may visit the Vatican, and Hindus may visit Varanasi. Religious tourism may occasionally incorporate cultural exploration components, as religious sites frequently possess significant historical and architectural significance. India, like many other nations with a diverse religious population, attracts a large number of religious tourists each year. This type of tourism is also called special interest tourism. Nearly every major religion in the world has a pilgrimage site in India. This includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Sufism. Millions of pilgrims visit these holy sites year in search of meaning in their lives, a link to their faith's past, or a chance to take part in significant celebrations and ceremonies.

Famous religious sites that draw both believers and nonbelievers include the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Buddhist Bodh Gaya, the Hindu pilgrimage site of Varanasi, and the Sufi shrine of Ajmer. The historical link between these holy sites and their religious importance has contributed to their transformation into prominent tourist destinations.

The religious tourism industry is crucial to India's domestic tourism growth. Pilgrimages are a major source of domestic tourism, which in turn boosts the economy, generates employment opportunities, and facilitates cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Therefore, domestic tourism in India has greatly benefited from religious tourism, which is important for both spiritual and practical reasons.

### **Characteristics of Religious Tourism**

- To express gratitude, confess sin and perform a vow
- To achieve social and spiritual salvation
- To commemorate and celebrate certain religious events
- To enhance one's knowledge
- To perform pilgrimage as an act of worship

### **Characteristics of Sustainable Tourism**

- Religious tourism is the core driving force behind the domestic market.
- In addition to the economic value, it fosters communal harmony and leads to a cleaner social environment.
- Emergence of detrimental aspects like massive environmental degradation, poor sanitation and tourist harassment.
- While large-scale infrastructure creation for the lower and mid-segment tourist has led to oversupply, lack of infrastructure catering to higher categories and long-haul visitors has resulted in lost revenue opportunities.
- Despite these challenges, pilgrimages and spiritual travel will sustain visitor numbers, and the time is ripe to put a religious sustainable infrastructure in place.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To study the religious cultural heritage resources of Khatara satra .
- To identify and explore factors influencing the sustainable religious tourism development in the study area.
- To identify the problems that can emerge from the religious tourism in the area.
- To suggest strategies to mitigate risk impending with tourist inflow in the study area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

- Pilot study with 26 participants – Field Visits
- Secondary Data – Published Articles (Scopus and Web of Science)
- Proposed Study – Pre-test, pilot study and main study with larger sample
- Multivariate Data Analysis (Higher order) for Scale Development and testing, model building and testing

## **ABOUT THE STUDY AREA**

Satra was founded by Lechakonia Govinda Aatoi, the submissive disciple of saint madhavdeva in 1568 AD. Govinda aatoi was prominent amongst the twelve dharmacharyya of madhavdeva. Born at the lechakona village of rangia, aatoi got initiated to mahapurush madhavdeva and later on dedicated himself to the propagation of vaishnavism. Is not only attracting the regional tourists and pilgrim spot, but also serves as national tourists and pilgrim centre. The number of people visiting the satra temple has been continuously increasing day by day. Khatara Satra holds deep cultural and spiritual importance in Assam, attracting both pilgrims and tourists interested in its historical and religious significance. The Satra is renowned for its traditional Vaishnavite rituals, unique architectural styles, and cultural festivals, which form an integral part of Assam's cultural heritage (Goswami, 2012). This significance underscores the need for a sustainable approach to tourism that respects and preserves these values while fostering economic development.



Fig 1: Entrane of Khatara Satra

## **CULTURAL HERITAGES OF KHATARA SATRA**

It is known from the legends that there were four ,'khats' (କଟ) i.e. evil natured people at the place where Govinda Atoi was preaching. Because of their evil persona, the locals called their nature as khatahur (କଟାହୁର).Govind Atoi and all the devotees who came with him, were able to transform this very nature of the four people and they started preaching Nav-Vaishnavism. Hence, the name of the place changed to Khat-hara (କଟହରା) and later as Khatara(କଟରା). Most of the youngstars are trained up with satriya cultural heritages such as borgeet,khol,tal,satriya dance,bhaona,thiyo naam etc in the satra itself.



Fig 2: Indoor view of Khatara Satra

## THE PACHETI FESTIVAL

In the indigenous language of Darrang, 'Pascheti' is also called a festival. Sankranti centric festival 'Pasthi' is not considered as a festival but it is considered as a fair festival. From the Sankranti of the month of Bhadra to the first day of the month of Aahan, the famous Pasthi festival in Khatra Satra was celebrated directly on the fifth day of Janmashtami, although later the tradition of celebrating Pasthi on the same date of Domahi and Aahan of Bhadra-Aahan continued. The main feature of this festival is that it is centered on the birth of Krishna. Krishna Bhakti is associated with this festival. According to the tradition of the folk society, from the maternity home to another place on the fifth day after the birth of the newborn is taken. Keeping away from that tradition the tradition of celebrating 'Pacheti' festival on the fifth day of the birth of Shri Krishna has been going on in some satras of Assam in the traditional way, in Khatra Satra also this Pachti festival is being celebrated every year through the rituals of Satra. Finally, this Pacheti festival started being celebrated in Satras by connecting the story of the birth of Krishna. Shri Krishna was born on the Ashtami tithi of Bhadra month and after five days, the custom of celebrating

Pascheti festival was introduced. At some places leaves of five palms are also seen. Due to the fear of Kansa, this festival is celebrated on the occasion of late harvest and bathing, leaving behind the harvest season of the Bhadra month. Every year, the festival of Janmashtami is celebrated on the second day of the month of Shravan. Arguments can be found that the beginning of Paseti is from the days of Govinda Atai.

### **Khatra Sara Tithi centric festival:**

The birth and Tirobhava Tithi of Govinda Ata, the founder of Satra, the Tirobhava Tithi of Mahapurush Sankardeva and the Tirobhava Tithi of Mahapurush Madhavdeva are observed as central festivals in Khatra Satra.

(a) Sri Sri Govinda Atta Tirobhava Tithi: The Tirobhava Tithi of Sri Sri Govinda Atta, the founder of Khatra Satra, is observed with special fervour on the Shukla Chaturdashi Tithi of Sawan month. Devotees from different places thronged the temple on the occasion. In this context, it is the norm to sing of a kirtan. At least in context in front of the gurudwara of the residence of Govinda Ata in the southern direction, 'Govinda Charit' is recited. After this the singing of the satra is done by the bayan as usual. At night, the devotees perform the Thiyanam.

(b) Tirobhava Tithi of Srimanta Sankardeva: The Tirobhava Tithi of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva is observed on the Shukla Dwitiya Tithi of Bhadrapada month. Despite the heavy weather of agriculture, heavy rains, the devotees of Satra and the local people start coming to Satra from the morning. The congregation offers devotional homage to the Guru in the formal naam-sharing. Along with the context, Guru Charit is also recited.

(c) Tirobhava Tithi of Mahapurush Madhavdev: The Tirobhava Tithi of Mahapurush Madhavdev is observed on the fifth day in the month of Bhadrapada. On coming to establish Khatra Satra, Govinda Ata, the disciple of Madhavdeva, was constantly giving alms to Govinda Ata through Madhav Guru for the treatment of the problems faced by him. Therefore, the devotees of Satra, the people of Vaishnava Satras and the local people observe the Tirobhava Tithi of Madhavdeva with great fervor.

(d) Nandotsava: Nandotsava is celebrated on the next day after Janmashtami. Khatra Satra Nandotsav is organized as a symbol of the joy that arose in the house of the Nanda king on the joy of Krishna 's birth. There is a special significance of this festival. A significant event of the festival is 'Boka Bhaona '. It is a combination of faith and religion. The arrangement of this colorful Bokka Bhaona of Khatra Satra is also interesting. Kirtan is kept on the floor of the house by bringing mud from the

sacred place. Muddy water is sprinkled on the ground by bringing the holy water from the Bar pond of Satra. Ghee - honey etc are mixed with this powder. Devotees, Vaishnavs and a few people gathered at the place of bhaona and recite the name of the deity and put colours on the idol. It is noteworthy that there is a popular belief that by participating in the bhaona of the Nandotsav celebrated in the Satra or by having darshan one becomes pious. On the other hand, the murky water of Boka Bhaona cures diseases, death and death. There's an old belief. That is why the tradition of taking bath in muddy water is seen in Buka Bhawana. Although bathing in the Borpukhuri of Satra is generally prohibited, it is believed that there is no harm in bathing in it on that day as Boka Bhaona is a sacred event.

(e) Borgopini Sarah: On the full moon day of the month of Bahag, this organization ceremony is concluded in a grand manner every year with the gathering of local and far-flung mothers. The ceremony, which ends with the chanting of the naames by the mothers in the courtyard of the Guru's house to the south of the Kirtan house, is also called the "Naam of the Great Gopini" by the locals. Because of the prominent role played by the women in the Naam-Kirtan, this organizational event may have been called "Bara Gopini's Sabah" or "Bara Gopini's Naam." They sing the verses of the Dihanam in addition to the verses of the Ghosha-Kirtan. The spiritual bliss of chanting God's name by participating in the collective chanting along with giving an opportunity for the exchange of goodwill, harmony, mutual understanding among the mothers inspires them to create a spiritual atmosphere in their homes as well

f)Holi or DouL Festival: Phakuwa or DouL Festival, one of the festivals of Khatra Satra, is a spiritual festival of Satra. Usually, the festival of colors is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Phagun, Chait with elaborate activities. Since Phakuwa is a festival of colours, it is considered a casual activity to play with colours on the day of Phakuwa or DouL festival.





Fig 3: View of religious performance inside of Khatara Satra

### **THE BARKAKAT AND BARFALI**

Among many other important scriptures in Khatara Satra, the main scripture is '**Barkakat**'. The Barkakat was gifted to the satra by the Koch King Dhajyanarayan. He gave this to Govinda Atoi during the development of the Satra. The King donated a huge amount of land and property to the satra which are all written on the Barkakat. It is 194cm in length and 24cm in breadth. '**Barfali**' came into existence either at the last of 18<sup>th</sup> century or at the first of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is made of marble stone in which there is written about the history of establishment of Khatara Satra and paying tributes to its creators. The image of Barkakat and Barfali are presented in Fig 4.



Fig 4: Image of Barkakat and Barfali

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Twenty-seven samples are analyzed for the present study. The statistical analysis of twenty-seven samples are graphically represented for this study. Forty percent samples represents zero income as per Fig 5. Eighty six plus percent have informed that they are aware of sustainable tourism and is represented graphically in Fig 9. Ninety-six plus percent respondent believe that the community will be benefited from sustainable tourism development supported by conduction of tourism building programs. These two responses are presented in Fig 6 and Fig 7. Hundred percent respondent agreed that the protection of religious culture is compatible and the same is presented in Fig 8.

What is your monthly income

27 responses

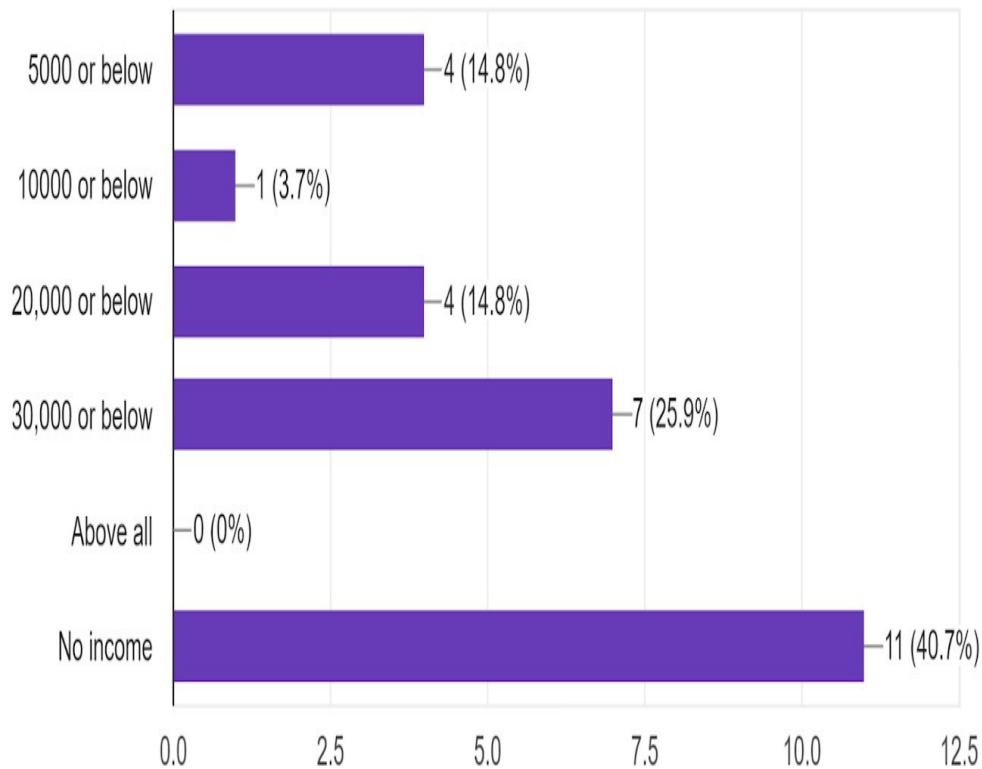


Figure 5: Representation of income status

Do you believe community would benefit from developing religious sustainable tourism framework

27 responses

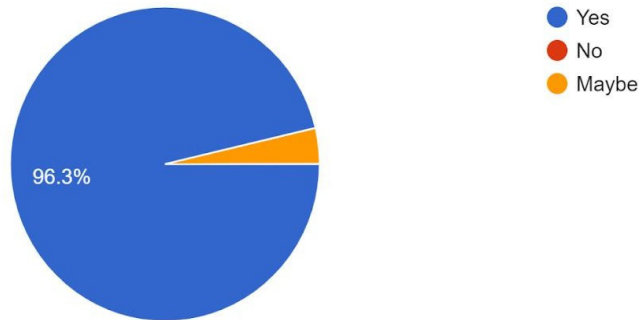


Figure 6: Opinion for contribution of religious sustainable tourism

Do you believe tourism capacity building programs should be implemented to bring tourism awareness in the area

27 responses

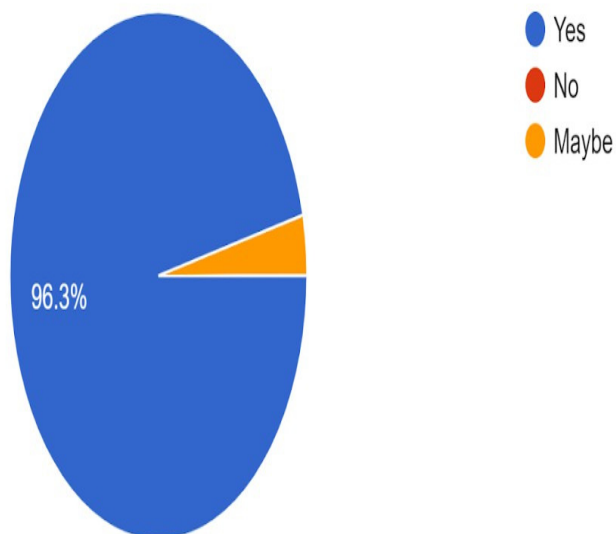


Figure 7: Contribution of tourism building programs towards tourism awareness

Do you believe protection of religious cultural heritage and tourism can be compatible  
27 responses

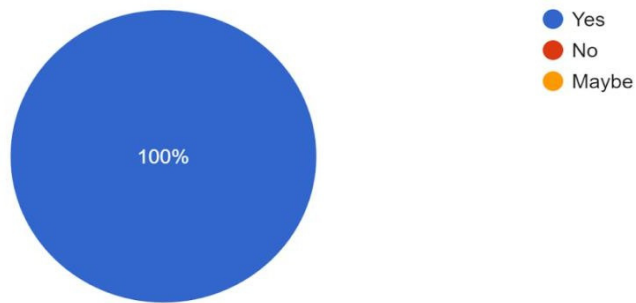


Figure 8: Protection of religious cultural heritage status

Do you know what is sustainable religious tourism  
24 responses

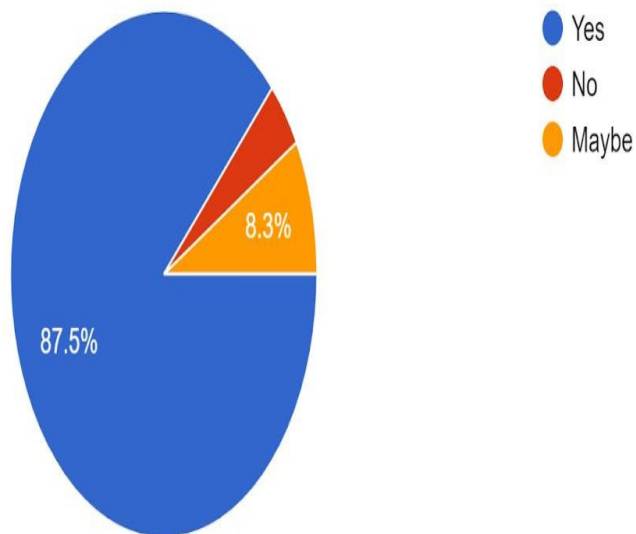


Figure 9: Sustainable awareness status

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

- The community of khatara satra are simple rural people who basically depends on agricultural activities.
- They have low income.
- Village people are involved in religious practices in the satra during the festivals or during some social activities.
- As most of the people are less educated and unaware of importance of religious tourism, it has become an essential to initiate those people with capacity building programs on importance of tourism and develop the socio economic scenario for the local community.
- They are interested in sustainable tourism and they believe that sustainable religious tourism framework will bring development to the community in the area.
- They should learn that there is more to do in rural economies than just farming.

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RELIGIOUS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

- To position Sustainable religious tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation in the study area.
- To provide complete tourism experience by enhancing tourist attractiveness of the religious destinations in a sustainable manner
- To strengthen the measures for pilgrim's safety, security and improving the quality of tourism services.
- To create employment through active involvement of local communities with proper approach in a sustainable and inclusive manner through development of a 'Responsible Tourism' Initiative.
- Creating awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increases sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.

- Promote local arts, cultural, handicrafts, cuisine etc. to generate livelihoods in the identified places

## CONCLUSION

Religious Tourism is a tourism which deals with the emotions of a traveler. Tourist are emotionally connected with the place. It grows business to a place, brings economic growth but most important is that it should be sustainable tourism.

Tourism has a positive impact on the vendors and the culture of the area. It is a phenomenon which is hugely responsible for economic growth and employment generation. Marketing can play a major role in promoting the heritage site. The cultural heritage and environment should be protected in a planned manner to save the religious cultural heritage site for future of the satra. To effectively manage tourism at Khatara Satra, there is a need for detailed, site-specific research. This includes understanding how tourism impacts the site's cultural and environmental aspects and exploring effective management practices tailored to its unique context (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Research should focus on integrating local perspectives, assessing environmental impacts, and evaluating economic benefits, which are often overlooked in broader studies. The background of this study highlights the significance of Khatara Satra as a cultural and religious site and the need for sustainable tourism practices that address its specific challenges. By examining factors influencing sustainable tourism in this context, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into balancing heritage preservation with tourism development.

## References

1. Alipour H., GT Olya H. and Forouzan, I. (2017). "Environmental Impacts of Mass Religious Tourism: From Residents' Perspectives". *Tourism Analysis*, 22, 2, 167-183.
2. Banerjee M. (2015). "Spiritual tourism: a tool for socio-cultural and sustainable development". *International Journal of Science and Research* 4, 10, 1244-1249.
3. Bhonsale M. (2019), "Religious Tourism as Soft Power: Strengthening India's Outreach to Southeast Asia", ORF Special Report No. 97, Observer Research



- Foundation.
4. Baruah, S. (2015). *Vaishnavism in Assam: An Historical and Cultural Study*. Indian Heritage Press.
  5. Beaver, P. (2006). *Sacred Sites: The Impact of Tourism on Religious Practices*. Routledge.
  6. Bhonsale, M. (2019). *Religious Tourism as Soft Power: Strengthening India's Outreach to Southeast Asia*. ORF Special Report No. 97, Observer Research Foundation.
  7. Butler, R. (1992). The Relationship Between Tourism and Religion. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19(1), 63-83.
  8. Butler, R. (1999). Sustainable Tourism: A State-of-the-Art Review. *Tourism Geographies*, 1(1), 7-25.
  9. Cohen, E. (1992). Pilgrimage and Tourism: Convergence and Divergence. In G. W. Schwenk (Ed.), *Tourism: A Community Approach*. Routledge.
  10. Dimitrov, S. (2019). Religious tourism and religious tourism resources, The Over arching Issues of the European Space-a strategic(re) positioning of environmental and socio-economic problems?, Porto, Fac. Letras Univ. Porto, pp.79- 89.
  10. Eid, R. (2010). The Economic Impact of the Hajj Pilgrimage on Mecca. *Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(2), 134-148.
  11. Gosling, S. (2015). *Sustainable Tourism Development*. Routledge.
  12. Goswami, S. (2012). Religious Festivals and Tourism in Assam: A Study of Cultural Heritage Sites. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 7(1), 45-60.
  13. Hvizdova, E. (2018). Religious tourism and its socio-economic dimensions. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 14(2), 89-98.
  14. Hughes, H. (2006). The Camino de Santiago: Pilgrimage and Tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 8(3), 309-322.
  15. Jansen-Verbeke, M. (1991). The Role of Pilgrimage in Religious Tourism. *Tourism Management*, 12(1), 65-77.
  16. Khalid, A. M., Sharma, S., & Dubey, A. K. (2018). Developing an indicator set for measuring sustainable development in India. *Natural Resources Forum*, 42(3), 185- 200.
  17. Light, D. (2000). Tourism and Religion: The Case of the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2(4), 257-268.



18. MacCannell, D. (1999). *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. University of California Press.
19. Nail, A. B., Sharma, S., & Sharma, R. (2012). Sustainable tourism development through integrated planning in Uttarakhand. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2(7), 1-7.
20. Nargotra, D. (2021). Religious tourism and its impact on community. *International Journal of All Research Education & Scientific Methods*, 4. ISSN: 2455-6211.
21. Prasad, G. (2012). *Temple Tourism in India: A Case Study of Cultural Heritage and Tourism*. *Indian Journal of Tourism Studies*, 8(2), 29-45.
22. Selwyn, T. (1996). *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth-Making in Tourism*. In A. Lew, C. M. Hall, & A. Williams (Eds.), *A Companion to Tourism*. Blackwell Publishers.
23. Singh, S., & Timothy, D. J. (2016). Cultural Heritage Tourism: A Review of the Literature. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 18, 16-23.
24. Timothy, D. J., & Olsen, D. H. (2006). *Tourism, Religion, and Spiritual Journeys*. Routledge.
25. UNEP (2007). *Tourism and Mountains: A Practical Guide to Managing the Environmental and Social Impacts of Mountain Tours*.
26. UNWTO. (2004). *Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations: A Guidebook*. United Nations World Tourism Organization.
27. United Nations (1987). *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*: 37-38

