

Role of Religious and Heritage Tourism for Promoting Handicrafts: A study on Selected Districts of West Bengal



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Abstract

Religious tourism sometimes associated with other forms of tourism, especially to heritage, cultural tourism, social and group tourism etc.. In history, religious journeys always were multi functional journeys, even when the religious factors seemed to dominate. In modern societies, the religious motivation seems to be mingled with cultural and heritage value and also unique architecture. A major chunk of the domestic tourists are pilgrims who visit religious places in various parts of the country. West Bengal too has many prominent old temples, mosques, and churches etc. which are visited by huge numbers of pilgrims each year. Fairs and festivals of West Bengal, a reflection of the State's socio-cultural speciality, add a unique flavour to her cultural richness. Certain places in the State have a historic legacy of arts and crafts like Panchmura in Bankura for terracotta work; Krishnanagar in Nadia for clay modelling, Kantha and batik work in Birbhum etc. The contemporary handicrafts are largely the visual manifests produced with remarkable fidelity to the historical continuance of thousands of years of Indian culture.

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Handicrafts, Artifacts.

Introduction

Tourism as an industry has become one of the rapidly flourishing sectors in the world economy. It has experienced a continual evolution, and expanding diversification over the last few decades. Religious tourism is one of the ancient types of tourism i.e., travel entirely and intensely motivated for religious reasons. Specifically talking about Indian business and research circles, religious tourism has recently been accepted as a thriving segment. In the present day modern Bengal, all the religions grow and exist harmoniously and contribute meaningfully towards the evolution of mature society.

Tourism is viewed as generator of employment, earning and cultural cross fertilization. Tourism is considered as an important means of promoting culture and international relations. Within India the state of West Bengal is a universe in itself. West Bengal the state in eastern India is endowed with uniqueness in its diversity.

Producing and selling handicraft articles are one of the key sub-chains in tourism, when it comes to the question of where and how poor people can benefit from tourism. Handicraft production and sales to tourists are one of the main pro-poor income earners of the tourism sector in developing countries. Handicraft production is an important area of job creation in the informal sector. Subsistence artisan and craftsmen gain additional income from household-related handicraft production and for the urban poor; the production of handicrafts is an alternative in an environment where employment opportunities are few. If it is associated with religious purpose it will get additional platform to promote extensively.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the tourism potential of Bengal in general and religious tourism in particular.
2. To study the interrelationship between religious tourism and handicrafts.
3. To study the special features of West Bengal handicrafts with special reference to select districts.
4. To examine the role of Handicrafts and its influence in Religious and Heritage tourism.

5. Analysis of issues and challenges involve in promoting handicrafts in West Bengal.

Research Methodology

Data Base

The data for the proposed study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected mainly from the handicraft sellers (40 nos.) in the study area in form of schedule questionnaire which are supplemented by secondary data cited in the reports of Department of Tourism, Govt. of India, Govt. of West Bengal, Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, West Bengal Industry Association, CII, WBHDCL etc. Apart from these some relevant journals, Magazines and newspapers will also be consulted.

Review of Literature

Handicrafts being a specific category of the broad group of rural industries, very few in-depth research works have been done on this. However, some references to handicrafts have been made in the context of rural industrialization.

Archer, Cooper and Ruhanen (2005) pointed out of the positive and negative impacts of tourism, including economic, political, socio-cultural, environmental and ecological dimensions of the issues.

Fayaz Ahamad,(2012)the handicraft sector has a large potential to generate a gainful employment opportunities to unemployed people and has a great potential for economic development of a country/region like Kashmir, which is known all over the world with its

traditional crafts.

The famous book of Kamala Chattopadhyaya (1996) "Indian handicrafts" is a famous landmark in the Indian cultural field. She says that Indian handicrafts thrived through ages stimulated by a vigorous folk tradition, a benign culture, and in an age when individualism was cherished and precision valued.

Kumar and Rajeev (2013) said that this the era of e-commerce. Internet has been playing a vital role to provide a common platform for each and every business. It is a cheap and strong medium through which a consumers easily know about any products features, price, availability, accessibility, order the products, paying the prices etc. handicraft industry needs this medium to markets their products which has an effective way through which the small retailers take these benefits after small investment and it covers large proportion of the customers including local, national and international as compared to the other medium of the of advertisement like banner, poster, pump lets, exhibition etc.

Lacher. Geoffrey, R. and Nepal, Sanjay. K (2011) TRR- Vol. 36(1): 27-37 "Economic impact of Souvenir sales in Peripheral Areas: a Case Study from Northern Thailand" the authors describe various economic of impacts of souvenir sales by using case study of a remote tourist destination in Northern Thailand. The case study indicates that imported souvenir make up a majority of souvenir sold and have much greater leakage than local souvenir. They

also raise questions as to the effectiveness of importing souvenir as an economic strategy in their study. The authors also provided the some local strategies to increase the economic impact of souvenir in their article.

Neha nagori (2012) opined that rural area is the main source of handicraft items and its required promotion strategies through retail format because it has taken about the easy accessibility of rural craft products in the urban market. It involved the marketing strategies including quality standard delivery schedule packaging etc. which provides a unique platform where the buyers and sellers meet and exchanges goods. The urban customers like rural products they want to the tradition or culture of the rural people and it has an effective medium through which it attracted the customers.

Selim Reza, (2012) bamboo handicraft helps to develop and upgrade the various nodes in the value chain and its direct impact could be observed in socioeconomic development of rural poor and small producer groups.

Showkat and Sharad Tiwari (2014) suggests in their study that the skill development and training programs have a far reaching impact on employment generation, production and economic growth, and provide very large amounts of sales and exports to our country, as well as the state's economy. Handicraft is one of the biggest employment providers next to agriculture sector.

S. M. Ghose (2012) talked about the different problems has been facing by the handicraft industry like licensing problems, low demands, lack of access to raw material, shipping problems, internet connectivity and lack of market awareness etc. which make this industry incapable to fully utilized their ability to give maximum productivity. The lack of market information and availability of poor infrastructure which make this industry inefficient to fulfill actual demands of crafts products of foreign country.

Overview of Bengal

Tourism is considered as an important means of promoting culture and international relations. Within India the state of West Bengal is a universe in itself. West Bengal the state in eastern India is endowed with uniqueness in its diversity.

West Bengal, now proposed to be renamed as Paschim-Banga is located in the Eastern part of India and is the nation's fourth most populous state. The State lies between 27°13'15" and 21°25'24" North latitudes and 85°48'20" and 89°53'04" East longitudes. It is bounded on the North by Sikkim and Bhutan, on the East by Assam and Bangladesh, on the South by the Bay of Bengal and on the West by Orissa, Bihar and Nepal. The State stretches from the Himalayas in the North to the Bay of Bengal in the South. West Bengal adjoins three international borders viz. Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

The state is endowed with all the diversities of nature and is to that extent a tourist's dream. The snowcapped peaks of the Himalayas, Darjeeling, referred by many as the Queen of Hill Stations, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway declared as a World

Heritage Site, the vast tea estates of the Dooars, the famed Royal Bengal Tiger of Sunderbans, the innumerable historical landmarks of India's and Bengal's glorious history are all wonders for the prospective tourists. West Bengal offers the tourists an opportunity to experience long unending beaches with gentle rolling sea lined with Casuarina forests. A number of sea resorts viz Digha, Shankarpur, Junput, Bakkhali, Sagardwip have sprung up on the East coast of Bengal.

Given the variance of the tourism sites in the State, West Bengal has something to offer throughout the year.

In countries attracting a large number of international visitors, the tourism sector offers many opportunities for poor people to sell handicrafts, as tourists spend significant amounts of money on souvenirs and other craft products. Tourism is growing, increasing from a mere 25 million international tourists in 1950 to 925 million in 2008. Forecasts predict that this figure will reach 1.4 billion tourists by 2020. Worldwide, travel and tourism is expected to grow at a level of 4.0 percent per year over the next ten years, creating an opportunity for every country in the world to be part of this process and to share the benefits (WTTC, 2009).

Tourist Visiting West Bengal in Last Four Years

Years	Domestic	Foreigner	Total Number of Tourist
2012	22,730,205	1218000	23948205
2013	25547300	1245202	26792502
2014	49039890	1375795	50415685
2015 up to March	70002123	1490112	71492235

(Source: West Bengal Tourism Development corporation office, 2016)

Strengthening the handicraft sector ensures that tourists choose to buy more locally produced handicraft items rather than imported products. Handicraft production can help diversify the tourism product to include home-stays, cultural experiences and facilitate the promotion of responsible tourism principles. Handicraft production is one of the key pro-poor income earners in the tourism value chain. The average tourist spends \$20-80 on handicraft purchases in developing countries. For many producers, tourism-related handicraft production can be a step out of poverty and particularly offers chances for women, ethnic minorities and raw material producers.

West Bengal heritage of handicrafts is legendary. The fascinating handloom textiles of the same regions as mentioned above are now attracting world-wide attention. Besides the garment materials, jute products, wood and cane products, conch-shell products, brass wares and folk dolls and handicrafts belonging to different schools of art as dokra art etc. Now embellish a large many drawing rooms. The handicrafts items are widely marketed by *Manjusha*, a state Government owned emporia and other establishments as well.

Rural Craft Hubs of West Bengal



Interrelation

Religion is interrelated with different forms of tourism such as natural and cultural tourism, rural tourism and handicrafts must be given enough attention on quality respect and co-operation.

Pilgrimage coincides in time and place with non-religious tourists that takes place in religious buildings or sites which can be generally considered to be one of the varieties of the segment usually called cultural tourism.

Tourism is going to be emphasized in all countries in the world in accordance to its potentials existed now-a-days it is extensively influencing all the society. In the meantime, cultural especially its religious kind has become an important phenomenon and plays a key role in developing tourism in India in general and West Bengal in particular.

West Bengal is a state which accepts many religions one can find many spiritual places in the state. These spiritual places are visited by pilgrims as well as tourist to experience the divine and the marvelous. The places have an intense history of religion in the state. Major festivals include Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Diwali, Holi, Jagadhatri Puja, Rathayatra etc. Durga puja and Kali puja which are the two major festivals of west Bengal, features colorful pandals, decorative statues of Goddess Durga and Kali, lighting, decorations and fireworks. Today's puja go far beyond religion and ritual worship. In fact, visiting the pandals recent years, one can only say that Durga puja today is the largest outdoor art festivals on earth. In the 1990s, a preponderance of architectural models came up on the pandals exteriors but today the art motif extends to elaborate interiors, executed by trained artists with consistent stylistic elements, carefully execute and bearing the name of the artist.

By developing religious tourism, West Bengal makes the best of their potentials and their enduring heritage as an economic mean to absorb investment. The fast growth of religious tourism in the last few years has dramatically altered the way the

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architectural heritage of Bankura, Nadia and Burdwan and promotion of craft works.

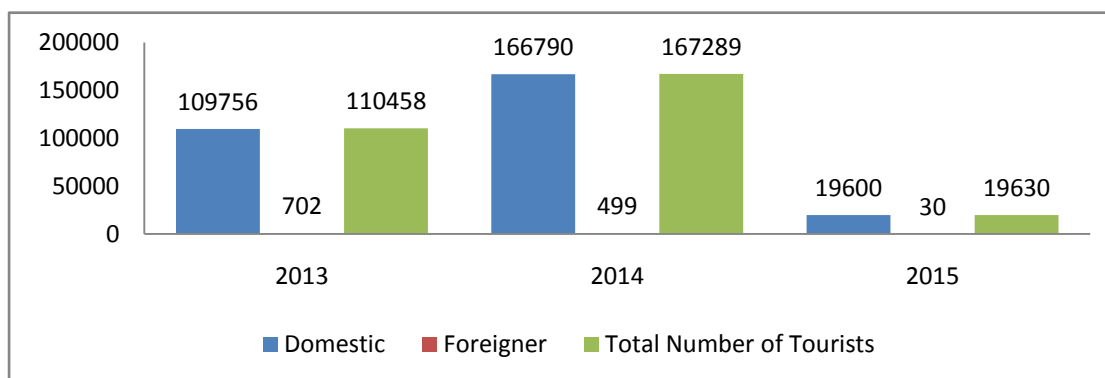
Special features of West Bengal Handicrafts and Selected districts of Bengal

The state of West Bengal is well known for the superb arts and crafts made of silk, shola, conchshell, dhokra, and beautiful clay models. Also worth mentioning are Baluchari saaris and kantha stitch, blanket as well as kinttedgarments. Bishnupur of **Bankura district** is famous for conchshell products as well as for Baluchari saaris. Malda and Murshidabad take pride in silk materials while the latter can also boast of producing exquisite ivory items. For clay model items Krishnanagar of **Nadia**

Years	Domestic	Foreigner	Total Number of Tourist
2013	1,09756	702	1,10458
2014	1,66790	499	16,7289
2015	19600	30	19630 Up to June 2015

district is famous in Bengal.

Tourist Visiting Bankura District in Last Three Years



(Source: West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation office, 2016)

Nadia

From realistic and naturalistic to symbolic the clay dolls of Krishnanagar have got recognition worldwide. From dainty human figure to large ones from animals to motifs of religious rituals, these art pieces bear the signature of inherent artistic skills as the artist are traditionally practicing the art from since generations. Clay procured from the river side is blended and mashed to form dough which is given different shapes and forms by the artist. Thin wires are often inserted to graft the different parts and give the object its desired structure. Vibrant colours are at times to render a perfect finished.

Adjacent to river Jalangi, is a picturesque village named Ghurni, the hub of 1000 artists making clay dolls. There are many national and state awardees including Subir Pal and Mriganko Pal.

A fair is held in month of February at Chandmari Maath, Radhanagar area in Ghurni offering opportunity for buyer and seller meet.

Bardhaman

The existence of wooden dolls goes back in Bengal's history. The art of doll making developed during the period of SreeChaitanya Dev. Owl sculptures from Natun Gram in Bardhaman district

Bankura terracotta is an internationally appreciated art form. It is believed that the tradition of making terracotta craft items started from Panchmura region. The artists then used to inscribe the temple walls with the artwork.

Terracotta products like traditional elephants and horses, flower vase, statue, home décor items, pot jewelry are common in any Bengali home. The artists of Panchmura make a wide variety of items ranging from depiction of daily chores like flower picking, fishing or nature like tea garden, park, monuments, streams or artistic depiction of local festivities like Charak to contemporary incidences like Kargil war. Today the artists also make utility products like lamp, tub, cups and plates tiles etc. which are in great demand at the urban market.

Panchmura has around 500 traditional potters, most of whom are men. The fair held in November in Panchmura village is an opportunity for the buyers to meet the artists and explore the range of art works.

shares the iconic status in representing Bengal's handicrafts. The dolls are delectable pieces of art. Simul, Pittuli and Gammari are used to make these dolls.

Religious characters and women figures are often inscribed. They bear the trademark style of folk art in its simplicity. In present times the crafts are showing increasing interest in panels work. They are depicting stories from Hindu mythology. Wooden toys have also been diversified into figurines of birds specially Owl, deities, Kings and Queens Etc.

A number of artisans have also started making wooden furniture.

Patronized by the rulers of Bardhaman the Sutradhar community in Natungram is practicing this craft since 200 years. Today 120 traditional artists live in the area. Both men and women are involved in these craft. A fair is held in the month of January at Natungram village which offers an opportunity for buyer and seller meet.

Dokra craft is characterized by its primitive simplicity charming folk motifs, rustic beauty and imaginative designs and patterns. It's one of the earliest known methods of non-ferrous metal casting uncivilized to human civilization. Nomadic

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communities scattered across the Chotonagpur and Central Indian plateau traditionally make Dokra measures and others artifacts by the "Lost wax casting" (Cire Perdue) process. Today Dokra artifacts rang from figurines, deities, Elephants, Owls, Deer, and other animals to ornaments like anklets', ankle belts, ear rings, necklaces, bangles etc. They also make utility items like Nut crackers, Kajjal holders, Vermilions pots, utensils etc.

Makers of Dokra in *Bikna at Bankura* or *Dariyapur in Bardhaman* had settled 120/150 years ago. There are around 120 men and women at Bikana and 70 at Dariyapur.

A village fair held in February at Dariyapur village of Bardhaman. Fair is held at Shilpadanga in Bankura in the month of March. These fairs are good platforms for the buyers to meet the sellers.

West Bengal is traditionally rich in handicrafts. There are more than 5.50 lakhs handicraft artisans engaged in manufacturing different types of handicraft products in West Bengal. Coloured photo identity card have already been prepared and distributed among 5,68, 985 artisans. Handicrafts department, Government of West Bengal has been implementing different programs for deployment of handicraft industries in the state and organizing the following:-

1. Export awareness workshop,
2. Training program on export management,
3. Skill Development training programme for skill up gradation of existing artisans.
4. Design development programs.
5. State level fairs in Kolkata and also in the districts every year for the artisans to sell their products directly to the customers in urban market. During 2015-2016 11,176 artisans participated in such fairs and total sale by the artisans was Rs-4786.94 lakh.

6. The state Government has also been providing TA/DA and also carrying cost of products to the artisans for participation in different fairs/exhibitions.
7. The state govt. has also implementing Old age artisan's pension scheme for the handicraft artisans. During 2015-16, 3187 artisans have been granted such pension.
8. Biswa Bangla showrooms have been opened in different places (Kolkata domestic terminal , Kolkata International Terminal, Dakshinapan in Kolkata, Bagdogra airport, New Delhi, Darjeeling, Park Street, New Town) to promote marketing of handicraft products.
9. The State Government has been closing working with other organization for design development, creation of new products etc. on continuous basis to help the artisans.

Providing marketing support to the handicraft artisans is an important programme of the MSME&T Department. The MSME&T department in the state Government has been organizing a number of state level handicraft expos in different districts in addition to the West Bengal state handicrafts expos, organized at Milan Mela complex, Kolkata from 18-11-2016 to 12-12-2016 where 3780 Handicrafts artisans participated and total sale was Rs- 2875.09 lakh , besides the West Bengal state handicrafts expo 2016-17, Siliguri organized from 23-12-2016 to 08-01-2017 where 785 artisans participated and the West Bengal State Handicraft expo , Krishnanagar, Nadia organized from 31-12-2016 to 15-01-2017 where 765 artisans participated with great success.

During 2015-16 West Bengal state Handicraft Expo, Bardhaman was organized at UtsavMaidan from 21-01-2016 to 08-02-2016 where 701 handicraft artisans participated and total sale of product in the expo was Rupees -354 Lakhs.

	ISSUES	CHALLENGES
Raw material	Inadequate supply of raw materials	Highly expensive and poor accessibility of raw materials make the artisans difficult to meet their demand.
Capital needs	Involvement in craft work is low due to earning opportunities from employment, casual sale enterprises & community contracts	Requirements of funds Very low export prospects from the Government, Hesitate to involve their future generation in the family business.
Quality of the product	Lack of trained manpower Lack of better quality of equipment.	Should introduce better materials use for manufacturing the product.
Economic Issues	Uplift SHG Demand of services and goods increase Technological up gradation in craft activities Interference of middleman	Local artisan not promoted due to proper platform and marketing techniques Rural people may be under paid.
Seasonality	Prominent fairs and festivals are very less during the whole year.	Sustain their livelihood without any hassle which they normally face during lean season.

Findings:

1. It is observed that the local economy of the study area is mainly depending upon tourist activities. But due to lack of tourist infrastructure as well as seasonality factor the income from tourist activity reduced drastically in the lean season i.e. from Mid-April to October causing inconvenient for the

- local people to sustain their livelihood who are involved in tourism business.
2. Handicraft is also a major source of motivation to visit the adjacent areas of religious temples.
3. People are engaged in different types of occupation. Some people earn money by selling different types of product such as, wooden,

handicraft and terracotta product, or people earn money by selling clay goods, or many of them provide different types of things required for offering puja purpose.

4. The need of the hour is to promote cultural entrepreneurship and identifying the untapped resources.
5. Promotion of heritage work trails, fairs and festivals, organizing workshops, developing home stay and other newer experiences should be more encouraged in a sustainable manner.
6. Safeguard the timeless heritage of people with the pro-poor mission of generating collective awareness and encouraging community skill development.

Major Suggestions and Recommendations

Following suggestions and recommendations may be taken into considerations both to promote and market of handicraft as a tool for development of tourism in West Bengal in general and Bankura, Nadia and Burdwan district in particular.

1. Financial assistance may be given to the artisans and craftsmen so that the production of handicraft in the district can be more and they can sustain their livelihood without any hassle which they normally face during lean season.
2. Both central government and state government should provide appropriate forum to market and sell the handicrafts both within the state and outside the state in form of assisting the artisans and craftsmen by attending different fairs and festivals related to handicrafts.
3. More focus should be given to the different Handicrafts Mela which held in the month of December to March. So that tourist flow as well as handicraft promotions can be made simultaneously.
4. Better promotion of tourism infrastructure such as good hotels, restaurants, electricity, better roads may be provided to the tourist in different tourist places of Bankura districts so that tourism promotion and handicraft development can be done in tandem.
5. Provision of better market complex in different tourist destinations in Bankura, Nadia, and Burdwan districts may be constructed for better selling and promotion of handicrafts in the districts and state.
6. Better co-ordination and conduct of different programs which is currently conducted by Micro and Small Scale Industries, West Bengal Government, as well as National Skill Development Corporation of central Government related to the handicraft promotion and development will resulted in both promotion and development of handicraft and tourism development in the state of West Bengal.
7. Since the foreign tourist arrivals to this district is very poor, so more publicity is required through different print and electronic media to attract maximum foreign tourist to these place.

Conclusion

From this above discussion we may conclude that there is a close interrelation between tourism development and handicraft promotion. The handicraft variety of West Bengal are varied and unique and have the potential not only to increase the socio economic condition of the people but also have the capacity to attract maximum number of tourists to the state.

Geographical conditions have contributed to the ethnic, religious and cultural solidarity of the people of Bengal. The arrival of the tourists also creates demand for the local handicrafts. This demand is fulfilled by the increased production of the goods in the rural areas. The more the expenditure of the tourists coming to a destination, more is its economic importance.

It has been proved aptly that these incoming visitors create demand for the infrastructural facilities, consumable goods as well as the local handicrafts. A high degree of association was observed between the purchase of handicrafts by the tourists and the availability of desired products at the selected destinations. Within the past few years the handicrafts have become one of the major exportable items of the country. Due to the development of the tourism industry and awareness of the importance of handmade products the demand of the handicrafts has greatly increased.

Thus in the end we can conclude saying that the tourists coming to Bengal bring hope of the native population as well as the demand for the handicrafts of the area. They have a positive impact on the handicraft industry in the study area that is to say, more the arrival of the tourists better will be the status of the industry in the rural areas. Better marketing facilities ensuring rural artisan's participation and an ensured market for the artisans are needed.

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