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# **THE GAZE**

## **JOURNAL OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY**

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Editor-in-Chief  
**Prof. Ramesh Raj Kunwar**

**International School of Tourism and Hotel Management**  
(Affiliated to Salzburg University of Applied Sciences, Austria)

## Aims and Scope

*The GAZE Journal of Tourism & Hospitality* is an annual peer-reviewed journal launched by IST College, Kathmandu, Nepal affiliated with Salzburg University, Austria in 2009. Journal is one of the most important sources of producing scientific knowledge in the academia. Basically knowledge is communicated and shared in the academic community through research. Not all forms of knowledge qualify as scientific knowledge. In order to be scientific, knowledge must be systemic, methodical, general and critical. The Gaze is multi-interdisciplinary journal which welcomes original research articles, research notes and book reviews. Articles should be original and unpublished, based on both primary and secondary sources reflecting new interpretations, written in English.

The research article should have more than 6,000 words; 3,000 words for research notes; 3,000 words for book review; and 300 words for abstract including five keywords. The research work should be based on global research methodology in which the researcher will be required to use parentheses or author date system or in text citation. After receiving the research papers, it will be first consulted by the editor-in-chief and then it will be sent to the expert(s) for evaluating the paper. The last date of paper submission will be by the end of June of the following year. The authors will not be charged any fee for publishing their articles.

## Call for Paper

The article will be accepted in the area of theory and field based research on sustainable tourism, mountain tourism and mountaineering tourism, risk management, safety and security, tourism and natural disaster, accident, medicine and rescue, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, festival tourism, pilgrimage tourism, rural tourism, village tourism, urban tourism, geo-tourism, adventure tourism, ecotourism, environmental tourism, event tourism, voluntourism, wildlife tourism, dark tourism, over tourism, tourism and politics, nostalgia tourism, tourism planning, destination development, health tourism, agri-tourism, tourism marketing, human resource management, hospitality, tourism education, tourism and research methodology, guiding profession, peace tourism (but not limited to:).

## Author Guidelines

Manuscripts should be typed double-space on A4 sized paper with a 4 cm margin on all four sides. The author should underline nothing except words which are to be italicized. Notes and references should be typed double-space on separate pages which should be included at the end of the articles. In case, if it is required, the text should refer to notes numbered consecutively throughout the article using raised numbers which should be mentioned at the end of the text before references. This means footnotes must be avoided. The citations and references should be based on APA method. For example (The mentioned below are pseudonym), in text citation, there should be: (Egger, 2013, p. 17); Egger (2013) and at the end of the sentences (p. 15); Indentation and Ellipses must be followed: ... one paragraph of sentences in single space at the center with italic... (published date and page no.)

The references will be started from the surname of the author e.g. Thompson, L. (2013). *E-Tourism*, London: Sage Publication. In the case of two authors, e.g., Smith, R., & Basnet, R. (2005). *Tourism Profile of Nepal*, Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point. If there are more than two authors, e.g. Egger, M., Thapa, N., & Ranabhat, K. (2013), *Rafting in Nepal*, Kathmandu: Nepal Association of River Rafting Agents, there will be Egger et al. (2013, p. 21). In the case of chapter published in edited book, there will be Fisher, X. (1980). Life in the Land without Wheels. In Ortnier, M. (Ed.) *Tourists and Tourism*, Kathmandu: Sen Publications. In the case of edited book, Lamichhane, S., Rawal, L., & Spenser, D. (Eds.) (2007). *Tourism in Asia*, New Delhi: Adroit Publisher. In the case of research article published in the Journal, Tarlow, C. (1991). Tourism, safety and security. *The GAZE Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 4(1), 7-28. If the text has been published by the organization, i.e. Tourism Board (2009). *Natural and Cultural Heritage of Nepal*, Kathmandu. In case of unpublished thesis, Rawal, N.N. (2012). A Study of Cultural Heritage Tourism in Bhaktapur, An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Submitted to the Nabil University, Kathmandu, Nepal. For 2/3 publications in the same year, put author's name (2015a, 2015b). Researchers are suggested to follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA Manual)*, 2009, Sixth Edition, Washington, DC. Entries in the references should be in alphabetical and chronological order of the authors. Tables and maps should be submitted along with the text, numbered with headings. Notations in the text should indicate where these are to appear. As far as illustrations and figures are concerned, the authors are requested to send along with the text where it is relevant and send it separately in jpg format.

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**Prof. Ramesh Raj Kunwar**

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**International School of Tourism and Hotel Management**

Gyaneswor, P.O. Box: 5196, Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: 977 1 4434350, 4434185

Email: [info@ist.org.np](mailto:info@ist.org.np)

Website: [www.istcollege.edu.np](http://www.istcollege.edu.np)

## **Editorial Note**

We are very happy to offer *The GAZE Journal of Tourism and Hospitality* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2021 to our readers. This journal is published annually in English by International School of Tourism and Hotel Management, which is affiliated to Salzburg University of Applied Sciences of Austria.

The purpose of this journal is to disseminate the knowledge and ideas of tourism to the students, researchers, journalists, policy makers, planners, entrepreneurs and other general readers.

Articles and reviews in the journal represent neither the views of the concerned publishers nor those of editorial board. Responsibility for opinions expressed and for the accuracy of the facts published in the articles or reviews are solely with the individual authors. The authors will have their own copyright.

We have realized that it is high time to make this effort for tourism innovation and development. We strongly believe that this knowledge based platform will make the industry and the institutions stronger.

## **Correspondence Address**

### **Editor-in-Chief**

Prof. Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
kunwar.dr@gmail.com

### **Publisher**

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International School of Tourism and Hotel Management  
Gyaneswor, P.O.Box: 5196, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: 977 1 4434350, 4434185  
Email: info@ist.org.np  
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**THE GAZE**  
JOURNAL OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

## Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism in Nepal

Archana Shivakoti

Ph.D. Scholar

Email: [archanashivakoti@gmail.com](mailto:archanashivakoti@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. It acts as an engine for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment. Tourism plays a vital role to uplift the living status of people in specific areas worldwide. Tourism has potential for creating jobs and encourages income-generating activities and it also leads to infrastructure development. In Nepal, tourism has uplifted the socio-economical condition of the locals and given them ample opportunity to better their lives. It has created path towards the elimination of poverty and has significantly contributed to overall development of the nation. It is also one of the major sources of foreign exchange earning of the country. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, tourism has suffered unprecedented setback and its effect can be seen on global economy. It has rendered millions of people unemployed and huge investments have frozen and unable to generate business and move the economy. This study will analyze and study the challenges faced by tourism industry post COVID-19 in Nepal and try to provide answers*

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### Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
[kunwar.dr@gmail.com](mailto:kunwar.dr@gmail.com)

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*for the recovery of tourism in Nepal. This study follows the qualitative methodology and the data is obtained through primary and secondary sources. As we move into the new era of travelling, tourism industry needs to adopt and focus on safety, personal hygiene and social distancing. Nepal is capable to adapt to the “new normal” and bounce back as it did post 2015 earthquake. But Nepal’s poor infrastructure, lack of implementation of rules and people’s laidback attitude could prove to be a hurdle and deter tourists and usher them to a more organized destination.*

## **Introduction**

Tourism has demonstrated its potential for creating jobs and encouraging income generating activities to benefit local communities in destination areas. In many countries it acts as an engine for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment. The tourism industry is one of the influential industries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019), the tourism sector accounted for 10.4 percent of global GDP and 319 million jobs to 10 percent of total employment. Domestic tourism accounted for 71.2 percent of all tourism spending in 2018 and had the strongest growth in developing countries (WTTC, 2019). The tourism industry is one of the influential industries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019), the tourism sector accounted for 10.4 percent of global GDP and 319 million jobs to 10 percent of total employment.

Nepal has been a popular tourist destination since 1951. It has diverse topography and attracts about a million tourists from world over. Tourism is one of the main sources of foreign currency and employment in Nepal. Nepal was closed to foreigners till 1951 as it was under the Rana Regime. However, with the establishment of democracy in 1951 and the first ever successful ascent of Mount Everest on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1953 by Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary, Nepal caught global attention. This was the beginning of tourism in Nepal. From 1955, Nepal started issuing tourist visa. The same year a private airline called ‘Himalaya Airways’ started operations followed by state owned airline Royal Nepal presently known as Nepal Airlines in 1958. By late sixties the hippies started to come to Nepal. They followed a radical and liberal anti-war philosophy along with experimentations with drugs and religion in order to discover their inner-self and find peace. By 1973 Nepal declared hashish as illegal and by 1979 the hippies’ number began to slow down.

From 1975 to 1999, Nepal was a popular destination for tourists of all categories. Nepal’s topography is varied and it contains high mountains, rivers, valleys, national parks, flora and fauna. The holiday makers, adventure seekers and cultural tourist each found something to their taste. The tourist count increased year after year. In 1998 Nepal celebrated “Visit Nepal 98” to strengthen Nepal tourism. There was a brief



decline in tourism due to the Maoist movement in Nepal from 1999 to 2006. However it again recuperated till 2015. Figures released by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation show that the number of tourists has increased from 602,855 in 2010 – 2011 to 803,092 in 2011 – 2012. The earthquake of 2015 slowed down tourism for some time however it bounced back and registered positive growth and even crossing one million in 2018 and 2019. The first three months of 2020 showed progressive growth till the government of Nepal announced the first lockdown on 24th March 2020.

A novel coronavirus named severe acute respiratory coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was first identified in a seafood market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province in China, at the end of 2019 (Zhu et al., 2020). The contagious respiratory illness caused by this novel coronavirus is called coronavirus disease 2019 or, in short, COVID-19 (Wu et al., 2020). From February, COVID-19 cases soared across most of Europe, the United States, Australasia, Asia and on to Africa. Until now, the novel coronavirus continues to wreak havoc on daily life around the globe, affecting 213 countries, infecting 30,034,435 people and killing 945,086 people until 17 September 2020 (World meter, 2020).

Nepal went into relatively strict lockdown on March 24 and cases of COVID-19 were one of the lowest in the region and there was a very slow rise of confirmed COVID cases. The infected number of people remained under 1,000 up until May 28. However, cases have increased over ten times since then as tens of thousands of migrant workers began returning home from India, which eased its internal travel restrictions on June 1, and as Nepal began a phased reopening on June 15 but as the cases rose steadily, Nepal announced the second lockdown on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020. Nepal's case tally is over 58,432 till date, although the death rate remains uncharacteristically low, so far 379 people have died till 17 September 2020 (World meter, 2020). This may be partly explained by the fact that, so far, most of the infected have been youth. On the other hand, the coronavirus crisis has brought to the front and aggravated a number of the Nepali state's long-standing weaknesses like corruption, poor service delivery, and a failure to provide employment opportunities for millions of citizens who instead migrated to the Middle East, India, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, and elsewhere for labor jobs and who now, unemployed, were coming back home, several were infected with COVID-19 and were instrumental in spreading and infecting others. Most of the people who were infected were Nepalese who came from India. As Nepal shares a long and porous border with India, in spite of lockdown, several people were able to cross the border and head home. These people were then able to spread it to their family and friends. Although the government has made arrangements for isolation shelters across the country, they are mostly ill managed and ill equipped along with poor hygienic standard. Few cases of people becoming sick and dying in these shelters have come to the light. This has highlighted the long standing problems in government

service delivery. As is evident, the public healthcare system is understaffed and under resourced and better handling of the situation is needed.

Although COVID-19 has been considered a global pandemic and everyone has been affected by it Tourism is considered one of the hardest hits by the outbreak. With the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, countries banned the movement of people as preventive measures to curb the spread of the virus. Transportations, hotels, and restaurants are the worst-hit sectors by COVID-19 and these sectors are directly linked with the tourism industry. The worldwide Lockdown completely stopped the movement of people. Consequently, the labor intensive tourism industry disintegrated completely with the arrival of the pandemic.

The impact has already started to surface in number of different segments like tourism, supply and health, trade and production linkages. Particularly, the entire service industries: tourism, hospitality and aviation sector have been affected badly by the pandemic.

With the launch of visit Nepal 2020 campaign in January, the country was expecting to draw two million tourists, but due the corona pandemic the campaign got cancelled which has devastated the hospitality and tourism related all business zone. With this pandemic the tourist arrival rate has declined to below 10 percent, from 70 percent which was prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Tourism sector, being one of the major industries has been contributing about 8 percent to Nepal's economy. Likewise, cancellation of all spring mountaineering expeditions, including Everest ascents, has resulted in work loss of around 23,000 tour, trekking and mountain guides as well as tourism personnel.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on analytical and descriptive methods. This study follows the qualitative methodology and the data is obtained through primary and secondary sources. International and Government sites, newspapers, websites, books, articles are also used for reference. This study has focused on professionals and people directly and indirectly employed in tourism along with hotels, travel/trekking companies, restaurants & transport operators.

### **Review of literature**

Elliot (1997) defines tourism as the fastest growing industry in the world. Governments in various countries at all stages of development are increasingly dependent on it.

Raju (2009) explains and defines tourism as the world's largest industry whose growth is creating rapid social, economic and environmental changes. Tourism plays very important role for generating the revenues.

Burns and Noveli (2008) talk about the ways of tourism development that can work in least developed countries. It also says that tourism is the best alternative to any work or development. As a strategy to promote development worldwide, key targets were defined for the achievement of the development goals. The international response was vocal and enthusiastic. Tourism, in particular, is seen as having great potential for shifting wealth from rich countries to poor, and in some cases directly at the level of families and villages.

Chang (2007) explains that tourism appears to be an industry that anyone can understand, but in reality, it is a very complex subject. It is a meeting ground for economics, sociology, anthropology, geography, ecology and national priority issues among other challenges. Issues of employment, prices and contribution to GDP are all a part of the scope of this book, as well. This literature presents the latest thinking from around the world. The findings from this study should provide important information that can be used in the future planning and management of the tourism industry, allowing wholesale and retail travel agents to improve levels of service and to develop appropriate products to meet the expectations of the travel market.

With no one able to conceive of rebuilding to pre COVID levels of demand (Bariso, 2020), and all visitor serving enterprises knowing they have no other choice but to adapt to new gathering guidelines, business models are bound to change (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020). Domestic tourism seems destined to dominate, with the vast majority of customers or visitors likely to come from nearby catchment areas, everyone being told to be very selective about the number of trips they make.

The possibilities are exciting, except for the fact that many people have expressed caution and have conditions: The first being adoption of a sustainability platform, such as those proposed by Raworth (2020) and Rifkin (2019); and, the second being the need to inculcate 'anti-fragility' so as to avoid being blindsided again. This concept, proffered by Taleb (2013), reveals how companies, countries and communities can ameliorate the physical shocks (associated with both climate risk and pandemics, for example), while escalating ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit.

Gill and Sapkota (*The Diplomat*, 2020) explain how coronavirus crisis has exposed the weakness of the government in dealing with corruption, employment issues and service delivery. These issues have triggered protest from the people and the poor treatment of the migrants, inadequate facilities in the quarantine, partiality in repatriation flights have highlighted the incompetence of the government. The government's focus on intra- party power struggle has overshadowed the more important agenda of preparing the nation for the pandemic. The government's lack of concrete system to deal with the pandemic might cost the nation lots of suffering and heartache.

Poudel and Subedi (2020) analyse the impact of COVID-19 socioeconomic and mental health aspects in Nepal. The literature explains how the pandemic has seriously affected Nepal's trade and tourism industry, along with agriculture, education and health. The pandemic has increased mental stress due to job and food insecurity, housing instability. The lockdowns, self-isolation, quarantine and social distancing have impacted mental, physical and social wellbeing of the people of Nepal. The economic recession has added financial pressure resulting in conflict, abuse, domestic violence, depression and family feud. The pandemic has given birth to uncertainty, anxiety, fear and insecurity which needs to be addressed seriously and immediately to avoid further damage.

Sah and Sigdel et al (*July, 2020*) have focused on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism of Nepal. The writers reiterate that tourism is one of Nepal's largest industries and it contributed 7.9% to the GDP and provided over 1.05 million jobs. By 2029, tourism could provide over 1.35 million jobs in Nepal. After the lockdown of 24<sup>th</sup> March, hotels, airlines and thousands of employees lost their livelihood. The Remittance contributes about 15% to the GDP and the pandemic has had an adverse impact on it as well. This is in sharp contrast to post 2015 earthquake when foreign remittance jumped 20%. The pandemic has also severely impacted the economy as well as health care system. The government has increased the budget for the health sector to 6% which is still below the WHO recommended of 10%.

The COVID-19 has reiterated the fact that Nepal requires long-term plan to prevent and tackle current and future health crisis. This includes a plan to incorporate an affordable service to all citizens of Nepal.

Pun SB, Mandal S, Bhandari L, et al., reiterate how a two weeks period of quarantine is not sufficient to prevent the spread of COVID-19 hence it is essential to increase the quarantine period to effectively tackle the spread of COVID-19 virus. In current scenario, quarantine & social distancing are the most effective way to stop the spread of virus in Nepal. However, poor knowledge about these issues and lack of awareness among people is preventing that from happening. Social media and volunteers can play a significant role in providing awareness about the benefit of social distancing and quarantine and help curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

The outbreak has affected people's lives as well as private and public sectors. Banks are suffering in loss of their investments in hospitality and aviation due to the coronavirus tourist slump. Not only this, the impact has been also visible in the manufacturing industries. As most raw materials including pharmaceutical chemicals come from China, supply of these raw materials has decreased drastically. Foreign employment has not only been addressing the Nepal's unemployment issues

but has also been contributing significantly to the country's economy in the form of remittance. The money that labor migrants sent back in 2019 contributed 26 percent to the country's GDP. Increased infection rate of the virus has impacted remittance inflow and government revenue collection as majority of the destination countries attractive for the outbound workers have declared a lockdown while the import has also started to decline as of late. In the current circumstances, coronavirus' effect on remittances is catastrophic. In the past two months, the remittance source has contributed less than one percent to country's economy. The downturn in remittance has created brutal impact on overall economy of the country. Apart from remittance issue, several daily wages workers, employees in different private sectors and service industries have lost their job. Many factories, consumer goods vendors/suppliers, businesses and a lot of restaurants, hotels etc have closed for good.

Among all the sectors, tourism is perhaps the hardest hit and is experiencing a rapid and sharp drop in demand and a surge in job losses at global level, including Nepal, putting many SMEs at risk. In Nepal, the tourism sector is an important source of revenue and jobs. According to the Ministry of Tourism there are 129 Star Hotels and 1151 Non Star Hotels which adds up to 43999 total beds. Similarly there are 3508 Travel Agencies and 2649 Trekking Agencies. An average tourist spends 12.4 days in Nepal. In 2018, the sector employed 573,000 workers (8 per cent of total employment) and accounted for 26 per cent of total exports. Three-quarters of workers in the tourism sector are in informal jobs, leaving them with no protection and no income as the sector has come to a total stop. Over 4126 tour guides, over 16248 trekking guides, over two hundred river guides along with several hundred naturalists and workers in service industry lost their livelihood due to the pandemic. Similarly, there are over 65 Tourist Vehicle Service providers that employ over four thousand drivers and helpers who are also currently jobless. It is a clear understanding that even when the other sectors will start operating after the situation is under control, tourism along with all the service/hospitality industries will be the last to recover. This situation has rendered millions of people unemployed globally and thousands in Nepal. The government of Nepal or any other authority has not shown any interest whatsoever to compensate or to support these informal workers. In several developed countries like the USA, informal workers received benefit cheque from the government allowing them to maintain their lives. In other countries like Bhutan they were given alternate jobs so that they can earn their livelihood. But so far in Nepal no concrete step has been taken to provide any form of relief to them. Some of the people involved in tourism have started alternative work, helped by family and friends but not all are lucky enough.

Despite tourism's proven resilience in responses to other crisis, the depth and breadth of the current pandemic will likely have a longer lasting effect on international

tourism compared to other industries, more likely to recuperate once major restrictions will be lifted. This is also due to the probable long term changes in behaviors with travelers likely to become more cautious about travelling overseas in the future.

In Nepal's context resurgence of tourism may take even longer as most of the travelers come to Nepal via India. As India is currently the second worst infected nation in the world, the road to recovery seems long and distant.

### **Economic impact**

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the international tourist arrivals will be down by 20% to 30% in 2020 when compared with 2019 figures, equivalent to a loss of 300 to 450 US\$ billion in international tourism receipts (exports) almost one third of the US\$ 1.5 trillion generated globally. The direct contribution of the travel and tourism industry accounts today for 3.3% of the total global GDP and 4.4% in OECD countries (average) with picks of 14%, 13% and 18% for countries like Spain, Italy and Greece respectively. Some countries are predicted to face more substantial blows than others due to their high reliance on the sector especially when considering an interesting comparison: out of the top 10 destinations by international tourists arrivals (France, Spain, United States, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, UK and Thailand), 8 result to be the hardest hit by COVID-19, implying that the economic shock on tourism will be further exacerbated in these countries.

In Europe, where the tourism industry employs around 13 million people, around €1 billion revenues per month is expected to be lost as a result of corona virus. According to the latest estimates, Asia will see the highest overall drop in travel and tourism revenue in 2020, with China accounting for the major share of lost revenue. Tourism is one of the most thriving and fast growing service sectors in Nepal which contributes about 6.7% of the GDP (WWTC, 2019). This includes both direct and indirect contribution of tourism to GDP. In terms of employment, the tourism industry in Nepal provides total employment to 700 thousand people with 500 thousand direct jobs.

The COVID-19 has been proven fatal to the world's tourism sector, including Nepal. The tourist arrivals in Nepal fell by almost 73 percent in March 2020. Nepal Rastra Bank on year on year analysis has mentioned that tourist arrival in FY2019/20 is expected to fall by 31.6 percent. The tourism based sectors such as hotels and restaurants and transportation are expected to hit hard by this pandemic. Similarly, the Central Bureau of Statistics projects a contraction in gross value addition of hotel and restaurant sector and transportation sector by 16.30 percent by 2.45 percent respectively. In 2020, the visit Nepal campaign was aimed at bringing 2 million tourists in the country by the end of the year. But the campaign was called off at the end of March due to the massive outbreak of the corona virus. The tourism sector is

likely to lose 85 thousand direct jobs and 36 thousand indirect jobs amounting to a total job loss of 121 thousand.

The budget of 2077/78 has some encouraging and positive articles in it for tourism sector. The main concern is the implementation of these articles as the government hasn't had credibility to deliver.

Tourism and Aviation in Nepal Budget 2077/88 show some hope for the industry. It has set uplifting tourism and aviation, which have been hardest hit by COVID-19 pandemic, as one of the objectives.

Among others, the budget continues allocation of resources for soon-to-be completing prestigious aviation projects, such as Gautam Buddha International Airport and Pokhara International Airport. On the other hand, internal tourism has been considered an important element in the tourism section of the budget.

In the context of the dire need for providing guardianship to the industry, the budget has made some important and positive provisions as follows:

1. 5% interest bearing NPR 50 billion loans through Nepal Rastra Bank for the tourism industry for operating cost and salary payments,
2. 25% wages as a relief to the otherwise unaddressed workforce,
3. 5% interest bearing NPR 100 billion loans for tourism and other industries hit by COVID-19 pandemic,
4. social welfare fund contribution to be borne by the government for the lockdown period and borrowing from the fund possible for the private sector,

Even though it is not complete, the budget is able to cover several aspects of Nepal's tourism. Plans for airport improvements, introducing latest technology, and better air service are positive. An encouraging aspect of the budget is the mention of the trekking sector including others. The interest rate of 5% to be offered to tourism entrepreneurs will probably be helpful but would not be sufficient to guarantee the existing jobs.

The main concern ahead is to implement the budget by incorporating the financial plan into the functional guidelines of the government. The previous governments have a bad track record of not properly implementing previous budgets. Hence it is essential that during this pandemic when tourism industry really requires strong support from the government, the government should ensure the effective implementation of the budget. So that all stakeholders, big or small, benefit from it.

### **Impact on education**

The pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closures of schools and universities. According to the World Bank (2020b),



the COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth in 161 countries to be out of school, which is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students. Several schools and universities have been conducting virtual classes to deliver the lectures however due to the conflict among parents and educational institutes, most of the private schools in Nepal have stopped their online classes affecting thousands of children. As a result, children have more free time so they are addicted to their cell phones and social media sites as well as online games. This has reduced healthy interaction with other children and nature. The addiction to cell phone is making children prone to irritation and mood swings.

In regard to tourism education, there are more than 50 educational institutes in Nepal that provide education related with all aspects of tourism and hospitality industry. These include all necessary services in hotels and restaurants like cooking, serving, housekeeping including all operational and management services. Some institute focus on providing essential training to produce manpower and qualified personnel for hospitality/service industry like Tour Guides, Trekking and River Rafting Guides. Apart from this, tourism and hospitality is now a lucrative career option and it is taught as an academic subject in several colleges and Universities. However, due to the pandemic and lockdown most of the educational activities are either suspended or only a handful of institutes are conducting online classes. This has resulted in fewer students joining in and those without access to smart phone/laptop and internet are not able to join the course. The pandemic has thus put a question mark on the future of the students.

### **Social impact**

Lockdown and social distancing measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 have heightened fears of increasing levels of domestic violence, which includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The concentrated time spent in lockdown means that vulnerable people are more exposed to abuse and it is more difficult for them to seek help. The coronavirus pandemic has been followed by a concern for a potential spike in suicides, exacerbated by social isolation due to quarantine and social distancing guidelines, fear, and unemployment and financial factors. Many countries have reported an increase in domestic violence and intimate partner violence attributed to lockdowns amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial insecurity, stress, and uncertainty have lead to increased aggression at home.

Various studies showed that people who are quarantined are very likely to develop a wide range of symptoms of psychological stress and disorder. Moreover, these days, people are inducing a considerable degree of fear, worry, and concern due to the uncertainty of lifting lockdown by the Government of Nepal and the time frame for complete eradication of virus to return to normal life. The most common mental



disorders are low mood, irritability, stress, anxiety, insomnia, emotional exhaustion, anger, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms and suicide. The pandemic related restraints, such as spatial distancing, isolation and home quarantine, are impacting on economic sustainability and wellbeing, which may induce psychological mediators such as sadness, worry, fear, anger, annoyance, frustration, guilt, helplessness, loneliness and nervousness (Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2020). The data compiled by Nepal Police shows that, from the onset of lockdown, 23 March till 6 June, a total of 1,227 suicide (16.5 a day) cases were filed, which is seriously high compared with the total of 5,785 people (15.8 a day) in the previous year. Most of the victims were either students or employees who lost their job. People with low income along with older citizens, care providers, people in the front line (medical staff, nurses, doctors, security personnel etc) and people with underlying health issues are most vulnerable and prone to extreme measures such as depression, anxiety and in some cases suicide.

Extension of quarantine and lack of knowledge and awareness to cope with COVID-19 has resulted in various mental health disorders in Nepal for diverse groups in the society such as older adults, care providers, and people with underlying health conditions, women, children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80% live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

Other major social impact in Nepal is the suspension of all religious activities in the country. This includes the closure of temples, mosques, churches, monasteries and all religious centers in the country. This has hampered domestic tourism as pilgrimage as well as religious sites are shut down. Several of the religious sites in Nepal like Pashupati in Kathmandu and Mayadevi temple in Lumbini are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They have global appeal as pilgrims from Nepal as well as neighboring countries like India, Srilanka and whole of Indochina visit it for pilgrimage and spiritual purpose. But due to the pandemic, all these sites are closed incurring revenue loss and suspension of domestic and religious tourism. Apart from that all socio-religious and cultural activities like wedding, initiation ceremony and all other cultural/religious festivities are banned because of the pandemic. This has also hampered domestic tourism and all income generation activities related to festivals and social ceremonies.

### **Safety measures and health guidelines**

According to the Operational Guideline with Health Protocol of Tourism Sector, a Nepal Government and Nepal Tourism Board initiative, following measures are to be taken during and post COVID-19 pandemic scenario:

Considering the looming crash in economy and job losses, once the Lockdown reopens, the Hospitality sector will have to look into reopening with safety and hygiene protocols in place. Bearing in mind that the health and safety of people:

employees and guests should be the first and foremost priority, safety guidelines and protocols should be implicitly followed.

In preparation for reopening, airports, hotels, restaurants, bars and all other infrastructures will need to implement workplace safety protocols, which could include providing masks, social distancing, physical workspace modifications, and screening and tracing protocols. Additionally, written policies and enforcement mechanisms are needed to ensure compliance with those protocols.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, regulation and monitoring of the protocols and sustainability guidelines will be an essential part of the implementation and will be carried out in the Central, Provincial and Locals levels as per procedures laid out by the authorities. The following measures are to be taken:

- a. Temperature screening of all personnel entering the property by trained personnel wearing appropriate protective gear
- b. For larger hotels, consider a sanitization tunnel for staff, guests, luggage and goods.
- c. Install an information board with COVID-19 safety and precautionary measures in a visible area of hotel
- d. In case of anyone found symptomatic, hotels shall process to refer them to a government designated health facility
- e. Mandatory wearing of Masks by all
- f. At entry point a log book Sheet with name, contact details of the guest date and time of arrival/departure to be maintain for contact tracing.
- g. Provision of COVID-19 audio broadcast in the premises
- h. Stock masks, gloves and mini sanitizers (complimentary/for sale) for in-house guests.
- i. Social Distancing Measures, Hand Cleaning, and Respiratory Hygiene
- j. Monitoring Guests for Potential Infection
- k. All staff in each service providing facility should perform personal hygiene like regular hand washing and respiratory hygiene frequently.
- l. Guests should be reminded when entering and leaving the restaurant, breakfast, or dining room to disinfect their hands with disinfectant gel, preferably located at the entrance to those facilities.

### **Future impact on tourism**

Various industry organizations have already published estimates of the consequences of COVID-19 for the global tourism industry in 2020. As indicated,

these estimates necessitate to be treated with general caution, as it remains basically uncertain how the pandemic will develop until September, and how travel restrictions and huge job losses will impact tourist demand during the important northern hemisphere summer season and beyond. While no organization has a crystal ball, the expected extent of the impact is vital to understand COVID-19 is no ordinary blow to global tourism and has no analogue since the massive expansion of international tourism began in the 1950s.

Nepal depends a lot on tourism so it is evident that the government and all stakeholders should revise and rework a concrete future plan to adapt to the new way of traveling. The road to recovery will be slow and difficult as travelers have chosen to stay home rather than travel and risk getting infected with COVID-19. So the current mindset of a traveler is to wait and watch and judge how a country is dealing with the pandemic. So, the quintessential factor is to ensure the potential traveler that Nepal is a safe destination. The impact of the pandemic will certainly affect the staff, service providers as well as the tourism infrastructure. If these stakeholders are unwilling or unable to improvise and modify their product and meet the global safety/hygiene standard, they will face a grave consequence.

As highlighted, UNWTO (2020b) has projected a 20 to 30% decline in 2020 international arrivals that would translate into losses of tourism receipts of US\$300 to 450 billion. Much higher is the estimate by WTTC (2020), expecting a loss of up to US\$2.1 trillion in 2020. These figures show that COVID-19 has had an unparalleled impact on tourism but as it has been seen in the past, tourism has revived and bounced back several times after a crisis. A key question for all tourism subsectors is thus when travel, international as well as domestic, or when tourism and hospitality businesses such as accommodation, bars, cafés, entertainment zones or restaurants can reopen and whether the travelers will be willing to travel long distance or overseas soon.

The COVID-19 crisis should thus be seen as an opportunity to critically reconsider tourism's growth arc, and to question the logic of more arrivals means greater benefits. This may begin with a review of the positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, as a result of the significant decline in demand, airlines have begun to phase out old and inefficient aircraft (Simple Flying, 2020). Video conferences, a missed opportunity to reduce transport demand (Banister & Stead, 2004) for years, has become extensively accepted by home office workers, including students forced into online learning, and business travelers avoiding non essential air travel. As affirmed by Cohen et al. (2018), many business travelers will gladly welcome opportunities to fly less. Importantly, even high profile exchanges, such as the G20 Leader's meeting on 26 March 2020, have for the first time been organized through video conference (European Council, 2020). After months of these new work arrangements, for how many organizations and workers will perceive benefits of continued or partial adoption? More generally, views on mobility

may also have transformed in everyday contexts, as countries without full lockdown have seen a significant rise in cycling and outdoor activities.

These ongoing positive changes may be seen as signs for change on a broader level that will lead the global tourism system reoriented towards the SDGs, rather than “growth” as an abstract notion benefitting the few (Piketty, 2015). To this end, resilience research in tourism has highlighted the need to consider the zero carbon imperative in combination with destination models seeking to reduce leakage and to better capture and distribute tourism value (Hall, 2009; Gössling et al., 2016). There may be an insight that tourism in its current form is not resilient, as profitability and liquidity are often marginal; a situation owed to overcapacity in air transport and accommodation, which again can be linked to subsidies, market deregulation, and the apparent disinterest of policy makers for a radical change.

### **Recovery methods and strategies**

The crisis is ongoing but in different parts of the world, the impact of COVID-19 is waning and lockdown has been eased down with caution. Similarly, the number of infected cases are also decreasing apart from the US, Brazil and India. In Europe, several countries have opened up their borders to tourists. Nepal has somehow stabilized the situation after a rise in cases and recovery rate is impressive. The government is contemplating to restart international air connection in near future.

Nepal has taken initiative to open up tourism related activities following safety guidelines. Mountain expeditions are to be allowed, following which climbers have started arriving in Kathmandu. Upon arrival, apart from temperature checking, negative results from a PCR test acquired within 72 hours prior to departure from the country of origin are essential for entry. Similarly, tourist buses as well as limited domestic flights will start operating at half capacity from 21<sup>st</sup> September.

While this looks like a step towards recovery, travelling has taken a whole new meaning and dimension than before. The COVID-19 impact has raised questions like “What are the short term and long term solutions that can be implemented?” It is a difficult question to answer in a developing country like Nepal which is ill equipped to handle crisis and formulation and implementation of rules are difficult to manage.

However, to rejuvenate tourism all stakeholders must be actively involved. The authorities should have a resolution about what actions to take to recover as quickly as possible? There is a need to learn the lessons and be prepared for the next crisis. There is also the need to observe the situation to notice what the longer term implications and/or predicted duration will be. Based on it, the stakeholders need to set up resilience plans. The plans should be based on the fact that usually rapid recovery occurs after the crisis is over.

To begin with, initiating the formation of a public/private partnership crisis management team to manage crises and develop recovery strategies. The rebuilding of trust should be done in a concerted and cooperative effort involving government, DMOs, and industry. The government also needs to reconsider the balance between volume and quality of target markets for tourists and develop system wide recovery and crisis strategies while Identifying and focusing on sustainable competitive advantages.

The other recovery methods that can be effective and suitable for Nepal, is to establish recovery objectives and timelines, stratify and prioritize target markets, work with intermediaries as well as the stakeholders. Being positive and honest in communication; treating media, including social media as an ally would be essential. Nepal also needs to develop a new branding strategy as the old one may be tarnished by the crisis. The government and travel companies should look at ways of diversifying the market post-recovery as the more reliable/regular markets like US and India is reeling under the COVID-19 impact. This could be a new opportunity to restructure and open new avenues for business.

The government needs to work closely with tourism industry to develop a series of packages that can be launched at short notice. Packages can include special rates for airfare, accommodation, food, and beverage, etc. But while doing so the need of the hour is to try and minimize fixed costs. One of the ways to achieve this is to restrict all marketing activities as consumer confidence has been damaged and will not return until the crisis passes. Advertising and heavy discounts do not work if consumers are unwilling to travel. As an alternative, social media can be utilized effectively while incurring no cost. While cost cutting for advertising is essential same principle can not be applied to the tour packages. While price cuts can deliver a brief spike in volume, they can also result in long term pain for any business that pursues this strategy. As Nepal already has a reputation for being a backpacker's paradise and a cheap travel destination it is imperative to try and shake off this tag in order to attract high end tourists.

The financial sectors should facilitate the tourism entrepreneurs by securing additional funding to launch the recovery when the time is right, the fund can support retraining, short term job search skills, support groups, etc. Coordination and help from financial institutions for finance, credit and loan restructuring is required to survive. Since the pandemic is far from over, the initial focus should be domestic and nearby markets. Reassuring the local community is necessary. Encourage local residents to visit the local attractions or spots first. People are more aware of the real situation of the local epidemic, so they are more confident to have some tourism related activities with family in local areas.

Marketing should be progressive and gradual with expansion aiming at cured markets first and then expanding to more markets. One great example is to follow PATA's nine step marketing and communication process:

- Step 1: Get the prime message out: We are open for business; tourists are welcome and wanted;
- Step 2: Setting out the facts: Our destinations/hotel/tour/ attraction/flights are operating; outline restrictions and limitations;
- Step 3: Complementary alliances with principals. Joint arrangements with hoteliers, resorts, restaurants, attractions, land tours, and air links; value added arrangements between complementing principals;
- Step 4: Restoring confidence in source markets. Travel agents and travel writers' familiarization trips: choose opinion leaders;
- Step 5: Protecting profitability during marketing recovery: offer incentives which will enable the business to sustain profitability, value add rather than discount;
- Step 6: Reimage the business and the destination: retheme advertising and promotion;
- Step 7: Incentives which attract tourists, value added products;
- Step 8: Publicize the positives: positive news of resurgence of tourist arrivals, rebuilding and enhancements of infrastructure;
- Step 9: Reporting and monitoring progress: publicize the changes and enhancements made.

The focus should be the big picture policy initiatives that can be considered, such as visa waiver changes. The government should also provide a grace period on local taxes, simplify visa rules, reduce or waive travelers' taxes and support economically hit destinations with promotion and marketing to attract tourists. Coordination by governments at all levels (national, state, regional, local) to deliver a consistent message to the consumer is essential. This in turn will assure consumers the destination is safe. Remind them of any actions the destination may still be implementing (such as virus checks, other security measures, etc.). Sanitization of the vehicles, toilets, restaurants, hotels should also be strictly managed. COVID-19 negative certificate issued by their home country should be made mandatory. This will build on trust and relationship and assure people involved at every level that their safety and health is also important and it will keep them dedicated and motivated.

Once the tourists arrive, appropriate screening measures on check in such as temperature screening should be implemented along with detailed cleaning/sanitation.

Advanced technological solutions to address fears (contactless and robotized access, information) and cutting down on unnecessarily human close contacts is essential. The stakeholders should reassure customers that you are doing all you can to make the destination/business safe. This in turn will enhance safety for domestic as well as international tourists.

The key to provide high quality service is to ensure that well trained and qualified staff is available at any site and destination. It is also important to keep the staff safe and motivated. It is significant to keep tourism staff in their jobs and develop mutual solutions as much as possible and to empower them to make decisions and make mutually beneficial arrangements.

Protection and welfare of workers from unemployment and loss of income (short time work schemes, upskilling and reskilling programs) and support for self employed tourism stakeholders is needed as it will lead the way to be prepared for a strong rebound in demand. Like a coiled spring, the harder it is depressed, the stronger it bounces back.

### **Findings and discussions**

The world has witnessed a number of key epidemics/pandemics in the last 40 years, yet none had parallel effects for the global economy as the COVID-19 pandemic. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is changing and challenging the world. With no vaccine and limited medical capacity to treat the disease, non medical measures is the main strategy so far to contain the pandemic. Most countries reacted with various types of interventions, including lockdown (home isolation, voluntary/required quarantine), social distancing (vulnerable or entire populations), closure of schools/universities and non essential businesses/workplaces, cancelling or postponing events (conferences and trade shows, concerts and festivals, political debates and elections, sports events and the summer Olympics), and bans on gatherings of people over certain numbers even for most essential social gatherings like weddings, funerals etc. Apart from socio-economical impact, the pandemic has left a deep impact on educational and psychological wellbeing of the people.

International, regional and local travel controls immediately had an effect on national economies,

including tourism, i.e. international travel, domestic tourism, day visits and sectors as diverse as air transport, cruises, public transport, accommodation, cafés and restaurants, conventions, festivals, meetings, or sports events. With international air travel quickly declining as a consequence of the crisis, and many countries imposing closing borders, travel bans or introducing quarantine periods, international and domestic tourism slowed down steeply over a period of weeks. Countries scrambled to return travelers home, which in the case of important



outbound markets involved hundreds of thousands of citizens stranded in all parts of the world.

Incomparable global travel restrictions and lockdown orders are causing the harshest disruption of the world economy since World War II. Thousands of people were on layoffs and bankruptcies followed with hotels, restaurants, cafes, bars and other service and goods industries unable to generate any business at all. Several developed countries provided beneficial cheque to affected workers and citizens where as developing countries like Nepal was broiled in controversies, mismanagement and corruption.

With international travel interdicts affecting over 90% of the world population and widespread controls on public gatherings and community mobility, tourism largely come to an end since March 2020. Early data on impacts on air travel, cruises, and accommodations have been distressing. While highly tentative, early projections from UNWTO for 2020 suggested international arrivals could decline by 20 to 30% comparative to 2019, the revised forecast is that it could reach the staggering figure of 70 to 80%.

Within countries, the virus had the worst effect on virtually all divisions of the hospitality value chain. The brunt of cancelled events, closed attractions and accommodations, became immediately felt in other parts of the supply chain, such as catering and laundry services. Cafes, bar and restaurants had to close as well, though in some countries, a change to delivery/takeaway sales was allowed after some time to continue operations.

Tourism is especially vulnerable to measures to thwart pandemics because of restricted mobility and social distancing. The situation is unique. Within the space of months, the structuring of the global tourism system moved from overtourism (e.g. Dodds & Butler, 2019; Seraphin et al., 2018) to non tourism, vividly demonstrated by blogs and newspaper articles illustrating popular tourism sites in 'before' and 'after' photographs (Condé Nast Traveller, 2020).

The general conviction is that tourism will rebound as it has from previous crises (CNN, 2020). However, there is much indication that COVID-19 will be different and transformative for the tourism sector.

Every pandemic changes society, the economy, and tourism, and some of the key research needs to comprehend these changes and add to a more sustainable post pandemic tourism sector. As soon as the virus is restrained, there will be an energetic push by many to go back to business as usual, possibly to overcompensate for losses by even more forceful growth. However, the future of tourism is going to be transformative and the definition of success and failure has also changed. Tourism 'success' has been historically defined by virtually all tourism organizations: UNWTO, ICAO, CLIA, or



WTTC as growth in tourism numbers. This perspective has already been questioned in the context of the global financial crisis (Hall, 2009) and as the challenges of over tourism, climate change and COVID-19 pandemic further illustrate, this perspective is outdated. So, a more sustainable and nature friendly approach is required in future to survive in this competitive industry.

Remarkable and extensive research is being done to fast track the development and testing of vaccines, but the estimated timeline for the commercial availability of the vaccine remains 12 to 18 months. In the meanwhile, tourism industry and its stakeholders must be prepared and be ready to operate and run businesses in near future. This means rebuilding, restructuring or modifying infrastructure, keeping in mind the “new normal” i.e. reducing human contact, maintaining social distancing, upgrading sanitization and retraining staff. Tourism, in particular air travel and airports, must be part of new international monitoring and rapid response plans. This would also include a better understanding of tourism’s role in pandemics and modifications required to sustain. It is too early to know the full nature and impact of these changes but it is evident that they will be transformative for the whole world and every destination will require recreating its tourism from the base. All necessary steps for recovery should be taken considering the fact that a strong rebound in demand is to be expected which is a natural phenomenon, like a coiled spring, the harder it is depressed, and the stronger it bounces back.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has badly affected global tourism, resulting in unprecedented economical crisis and triggering unemployment, mental stress and uncertainty.

The crisis holds important messages regarding the resilience of the tourism system, with fears of a new recession and financial collapse, times like these calls for resilient and strong leadership in healthcare, business, government and wider society. Immediate relief measures need to be implemented and adjusted for those that may fall through the cracks. Medium and longer term planning is needed to rebalance and reenergize tourism following this crisis.

Indeed, if there is one thing that has been learned from the pandemic, it is preparedness and brutal honesty, even though these lessons are only gradually becoming self evident. Even so, those destinations likely to be quick off the mark will be those that have already placed a premium on travel and tourism, with government officials and business leaders recognizing them not as afterthoughts, or as a tertiary economic sector, but equivalent to a special kind of innovative and entrepreneurial cluster, even as a new form of a super cluster (Brookfield Institute, 2017).

It is essential that during this pandemic when tourism industry of Nepal really requires strong support from the government, the government should provide full cooperation and support ensuring facilitating and monitoring of the safety guidelines. Tourism sector will have to look into reopening with safety and hygiene protocols in place, bearing in mind that the health and safety of employees and guests is top priority. Without going into the special characteristics of tourism as a super cluster, one stands out: The desire and ability to work collaboratively, as a collective unit. To ensure revival of tourism in Nepal, the government, the tourism industry, employees and all stakeholders need to collaborate and work collectively.

As this pandemic has pointed out that the world is indeed a global village and people are all interconnected as well as interdependent. So, it is evident that global cooperation, dynamic thinking and progressive leadership are required during the crisis. As mankind has survived several grave crises due to its ability to adapt in the past same is required to survive this pandemic as well.

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**THE GAZE**  
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# The Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism: A Case Study of Lumbini, Nepal

**Bhim Bahadur Kunwar**

Lecturer, Lumbini Buddhist University, Lumbini

*sbhim98@gmail.com*

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## Abstract

*This research aims to discover and present the impacts of COVID-19 in tourism in the context of Lumbini and its premises. As COVID-19 spread globally, it has created many challenges in health and security, daily lives, the national economy, and the global tourism industry. The COVID-19 outbreak has been considered as the most challenging tragedy that occurred in the world after the 2nd world war. The World Health Organization (WHO) had listed Nepal also as a country with a high-risk zone of COVID-19. The travel restriction and nationwide lock-down implemented by many countries including Nepal have resulted in a stranded traveler's movement. As the consequences ticket reservation, flight services, transportation, hotel, and restaurants were closed and several job losses were registered in the tourism sector. The negative effects like fear, threat, frustration, and losing the confidence of tourism entrepreneurs appeared. This has brought changes in the tourists' behavior and their motivation to travel for the next few years. In Lumbini businesses like lodges, hotels, restaurants, and travel offices were also severely affected by the pandemic. Thus, the tourism sector has been*

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## Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
*kunwar.dr@gmail.com*

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*facing serious threats due to the prolonged lockdown and closing of tourism activities than the terror of COVID-19 itself.*

### **Background**

Tourism is the largest growing economic sector accounted for 10.3% portion of the global GDP and 330 million jobs worldwide in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). It plays an important role in socio-economic growth-enhancing business activity, earning foreign exchange, and creating jobs. The global tourism industry is also very sensitive to negative factors like a pandemic, natural disaster, conflicts, terrorism, and economic crisis affecting the various aspects of international tourism needs (Madininos & Vassiliadis, 2008). The tourism industry is also among the first to close down and likely to be among the last to restart after the crisis (OECD, 2020). In recent years, the two massive drivers of change to the global economy are climate change and global health emergencies (James & Budke, 2020). The COVID-19 is an example of a health emergency currently scattered all over the world troubling the global tourism economy (James & Budke, 2020).

The tourism industry had experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in Hubei Province, Wuhan city in China earlier in December 2019 (Buckley, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has given devastating effects and fear to the main industries of tourism and hospitality sub-sectors such as aviation, accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, conference, and sporting (Gössling et al., 2020). The United Nations (UN) reported that the pandemic would cost the tourism industry approximately US\$ 1 trillion losses and threaten more than 100 million jobs worldwide. The numbers of international tourist's mobility are expected to decrease between 58% and 78% (850 million to 1.1 billion) in 2020 (Durkee, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has not only led to the terminate of the much-ambitious "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign but has brought an unexpected amount of insecurity in the tourism-based economy of Nepal (Pokhrel, 2020). According to the study made by Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), there have been losses of more than NRs. 50 billion in Nepal's tourism sector since the COVID-19 lock-down enforced in the country. It is estimated that more than NRs. 150 billion investment is at risk due to COVID-19 (Tourism Mail, 2020). The major tourist destinations like Pokhara, Chitwan, and Lumbini have been severely affected in the absence of tourists and tourism activities (Karki, 2020). In Pokhara, about 700 tourist-standard hotels with an investment of more than NRs. 400 million and around 17,000 employments are at risk of losing NRs. 130 million per day in the tourism sector (Paudel, 2020). In Chitwan including Sauraha, more than 225 tourist hotels with NRs. 30 billion investment and about 16,000 jobs are at risk due to closure for almost six months (Tourism Mail, 2020). Similarly, in Lumbini and its premises, tourism businesses were completely shut down for the last six months with many jobs at risk (Lumbini Times, 2020). Through this research, the author is going

to investigate the major impacts of COVID-19 on tourism in the context of Lumbini and its premises.

### **Tourism in Nepal**

Nepal is a famous hub for mountaineers, trekkers and adventure seekers, spiritual and natural lovers. The global interest to visit and practice these explorations has put Nepal among the most desired destination for visitors and pilgrims (Ghimire, 2015). Nepal's pleasant climate, the eighth highest peak in the world, and the ever welcoming nature of the people is a remarkable possibility of tourism in Nepal (Khatri, 2018).

Tourism is also a significant key to the economic participation and well-being of people and communities in Nepal. It is estimated that Nepal's tourism industry has contributed to NRs. 231 billion i.e. 6.7% (USD 2,051.4 million) to GDP in 2019 and the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment was 6.9% of total employment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that travel and tourism investment in Nepal was NRs. 16.5 billion nearly 3% of the total investment in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). The report from the Government of Nepal showed, there were 1.2 million international tourists visited Nepal in 2019 (Prasain, 2020). The table below shows the tourist's origin segregated by countries in the year 2019.

**Table1: Tourists visiting Nepal in 2019**

Country	Tourists Visiting Nepal
India	254,150
China	169,543
USA	93,218
UK	61,144
Sri Lanka	55,869
Thailand	41,653
Australia	38,972

*Source: Prasain, 2020*

The Government of Nepal had targeted to attract 2 million foreign tourists and aimed to earn US\$ 2 billion from tourism through the "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign (UNDP, 2020). But, the global COVID-19 pandemic obstructed in making the targeted ambition into unsuccessful.

### **Tourism in Lumbini**

Lumbini is popular all over the world as a birthplace of Lord Buddha, listed in the world heritage site since 1997 (UNESCO, 2013). The Buddhist heritage sites of

Lumbini include more than 200 historic sites associated with the life of Buddha and Buddhism culture attracting visitors from early ages (Rai, 2020). The Maya Devi temple is considered as the heart of all monuments in Lumbini (Neuphane, 2008). The tourist route named “Lumbini Buddhist circuit” connects the major Buddhist sites of the greater Lumbini area in Kapilavastu-Tilaurakot, Ramagram, and Devadaha (Ghimire & Rai, 2015). Pilgrims and travelers with diverse cultures reach to Lumbini for expressing their religious and mystical feelings in several ways (Rai, 2020). The different studies showed that pilgrimage lies in the third main purpose of visiting Nepal and Lumbini is the first and foremost on the list. Lumbini is also one of the best places for practicing meditation, spiritual vacation, worship, and charity work (Sharma, 2019).

The number of religious and cultural tourism has increased steadily in different destinations in the past years. In the previous year, Lumbini had seen growth in the arrival of visitors except in 2015, the year devastating earthquake crushed in Nepal (Rai, 2020). The credit for tourism growth in Lumbini goes to the implementation of the master plan projects, better accommodation, regional government support, and increasing in promotional activities (Anmol, 2018). The Government of Nepal is also constructing Gautam Buddha international airport at Bhairahawa to transform Lumbini into a world-class tourism hub (Anmol, 2018). This has resulted in huge investments in small-scale hotels, lodges, and restaurants in Lumbini and its premises (The Rising Nepal, 2019). The table below shows the number of tourists visiting Lumbini between the fiscal year of 2014-2019.

**Table 2: Tourist arrivals in six years in Lumbini, Nepal**

Year	Nepali	Indian	Third Country	Total	Percentage difference of succeeding year
2014	902621	154216	136991	1193828	-
2015	488852	130262	129180	748294	-37.32%
2016	1015158	134269	136253	1285680	71.81%
2017	1251346	155444	145796	1552586	20.80%
2018	1170571	193635	169904	1534110	-1.19%
2019	1178140	206171	174015	1558326	1.58%

Source: LDT, Information Centre, 2014-2019

### Objectives and research methods

The main objective of this research is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises due to the restriction in religious and



pilgrimage movement. The study is based on a qualitative research method where the researcher has not only the opportunity to conduct unstructured interviews with the authorities but took a chance to observe and understand the circumstances as well. The research is exploratory and was undertaken from June to September 10, 2020, with the fieldwork carried out for a month in July 2020. The fieldwork took place in Lumbini, Bhairahwa, and Butwal. As the researcher is native, there was no problem with visiting the sites. Each interview lasted on an average of about 30-45 minutes with the related stakeholders. The questions were relevant to stakeholder's experience on COVID-19 and their thoughts regarding the impacts on the tourism industry in-context to Lumbini and its Premises. Pseudonyms are used to address the interviewees. The information collected from the stakeholders is analyzed and presented in the finding of the research.

The study is also based on secondary data sources. The published journals, articles, newspapers, textbooks, and emerging media coverage sources are used to obtain information for doing this research. The main difficulty of this research was that there were limited academic journals available on web sources about the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in Nepal.

### **Review of literature**

Concerning this research, the author has reviewed literature about the impact of COVID-19 in tourism through different scholar's articles. In-context to Lumbini, there was also a review of the literature but those studies were directly or indirectly related to the promotion of tourism in Lumbini. However, this is the sectorial basis review of COVID-19 impacts in Lumbini. Therefore, the present author has made effort to highlight the impacts of COVID-19 in the Lumbini area. This is going to be the first study on the impacts of COVID-19 in Lumbini and its premises.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

The name "coronavirus" was invented in 1968; appeared to be similar to a "corona"-like or crown-like structure when observed through the electron microscope (Weiss & Martin, 2005). Thus, the COVID-19 crisis is not the first situation in the world as numerous coronavirus were encountered in the past years causing serious effects in humans and animals. On January 12, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) initially named "coronavirus" as 2019-novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) and on February 11, 2020, officially titled the disease as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the 2019-nCoV outbreak to be a public health emergency of international concern as well as a pandemic on January 30, 2020, and March 11, 2020, respectively (WHO, 2020).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili justify, coronavirus is an acute respiratory illness transmitted

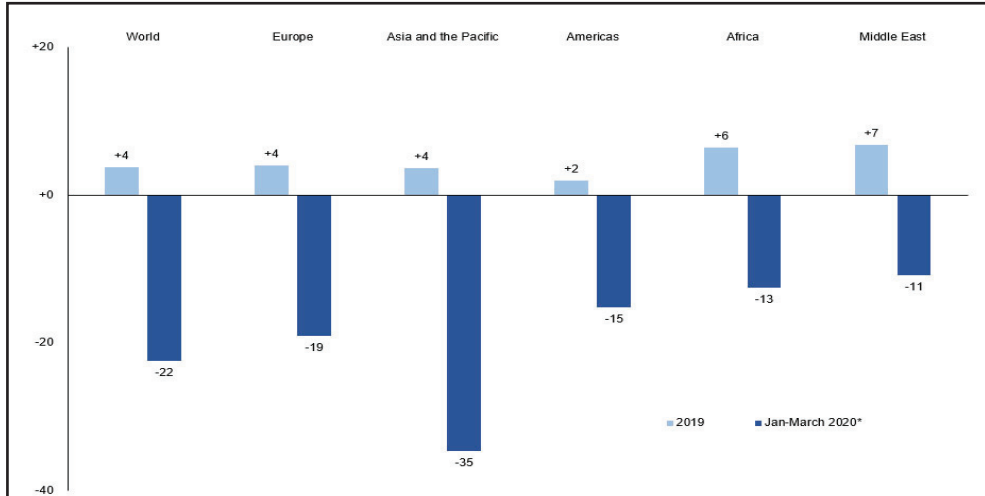
from person to person through droplets (UNWTO, 2020). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) president, Gloria Guevara argued, coronavirus is a global pandemic threatening the lives, livelihood, and everyone across the world (WTTC, 2020). In the same way, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also responded COVID-19 pandemic similar to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), as a humanitarian crisis affecting people's lives that have produced a global economic crisis (OECD, 2020).

### **Impact of COVID-19 in global tourism**

The international, regional, and local restrictions on travel, business operation, and people-to-people interaction have directly affected the national economy including the tourism system to an end (Gössling et al., 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) forecasted on April 24, 2020, that due to the coronavirus there are more than 100 million jobs at risk in the global tourism industry and the estimation would be even more worrying for the dependent portions of the population (WTTC, 2020). Similarly, The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated on June 1, 2020, 156 governments have announced travel restrictions to international tourism by closing their borders (UNWTO, 2020).

The pandemic has influenced on the tourists' behavior, disturbing the arrival of domestic and international tourism (OCED, 2020). Thus, the visitor arrivals, employment, profit in the private sectors, and eventually revenue of the government is affected by pandemic (Meditinos & Vassiliadis, 2008). In the United States, it was estimated a loss of around US\$ 3.4 billion for March 2020 due to the regulated travel ban for European travelers (Statista, 2020). The coronavirus had created numerous limitations on domestic and international travelers to gather and celebrate "Chinese Lunar New Year" in January 2020 (Jamal & Budke, 2020). Similarly, the coronavirus outbreak has transformed the prime tourism destination such as Venice and Milan of Italy into red quarantine zones, avoiding free movement of 16 million visitors (BBC, 2020; The New York Times, 2020). The number of tourist arrivals in Asia has also been influenced by the coronavirus pandemic dropping in the travel and tourism revenue (Policy Center, 2020). The figure below shows the arrival of international tourists in all regions of the world between 2019 and the first quarter of 2020.

**Figure 1: International tourist arrivals, in 2019 & first quarter of 2020 in all regions of the world (% change)**



Source: UNWTO, 2020

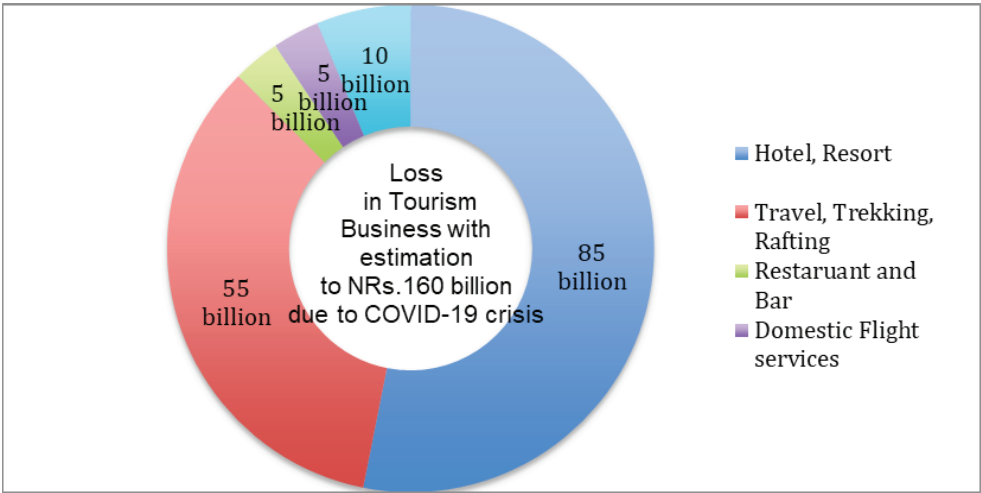
There has been an estimation by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that coronavirus has resulted in a 22% decline in international tourist arrivals with a loss of US\$ 80 billion in tourism incomes during the first quarter of 2020. The numbers could drop with 60% - 80% over the whole year with an estimated loss of US\$ 300 billion to US\$ 450 billion in international tourism earnings in 2020 (UNWTO, 2020; Pokhrel, 2020).

### **Impact of COVID-19 in Nepalese tourism**

The coronavirus crisis has created an unexpected amount of insecurity in the tourism industry of Nepal. The number of tourist arrivals in Nepal has dropped by 33% in the fiscal year 2019/2020 and is expected to decline by 62% in the year 2020 (UNDP, 2020). According to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (MOCTCA), the Nepal tourism industry has reported a loss of up to US\$ 330 million because of the COVID-19 lockdown imposed from March 24, 2020, by the government (Travel Biz News, 2020). The COVID-19 has more significantly affected the tourism industry of Nepal than the Earthquake in 2015. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB), the number of domestic and international tourism has dropped by 2% and 1% during January and February 2020 respectively due to the COVID-19 lockdown (Sanghai et al., 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicated that there has been a minimum loss of US\$ 141 million of possible earning from tourism between mid-March and mid-May 2020 in Nepal (UNDP, 2020).

The former CEO of Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Deepak Raj Joshi forecasted that the Nepal tourism industry could lose up to NRs. 160 billion in tourism sectors in the year 2020 (Sijapati, 2020). The figure below shows the estimated loss by tourism business in Nepal due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Figure 2: Estimated loss in tourism business due to COVID-19 pandemic**



Source: Sijapati , 2020

The hotels, lodges, airlines, tours and travels, trekking agencies, and nearly one million Nepalese depending on tourism are highly affected by the pandemic. The Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) stated that the coronavirus lockdown has impacted in closing down of nearly 1300 star and tourist standard hotels across the country, losing nearly NRs. 3 billion during March and April 2020 (Pokhrel, 2020; UNDP, 2020). The GDP growth of 7.33% during the fiscal year 2019 from hotel and restaurant in Nepal is estimated to remain negative at 16.30% during the fiscal year 2020 (Sanghai et al., 2020). The Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agencies (NATTA) declared that all its bookings were canceled during the major tourist season of the year (UNDP, 2020). In the same way, Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) conveyed that more than 3500 travel and 2600 trekking agencies have already closed their services, losing around half a million jobs and revenue of NRs. 600 million from mountaineering (Pokhrel, 2020).

### Impact of COVID-19 in Lumbini

Lumbini as a birthplace of Lord Buddha, a foundation of peace in the world and the heart of the Buddhist circuit has been severely impacted in the arrival of domestic and international tourists since the coronavirus outbreak. According to Lumbini Development Trust (LTD), about 13,107 international, 13,978 Indian and 67,942

Nepali tourists have visited Lumbini in January 2020, which was 48,060 less than in January 2019 (Habib, 2020).

The coronavirus had resulted in the closing-down of the tourism activities in Lumbini that has affected the livelihood of many people engaged in tour and travel agencies, hotels and restaurants, transportation companies, tourism institutions, and other businesses related to tourism in Lumbini and its premises. To put a scale to the effects of coronavirus on tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises; the data collected from interviewees are presented as findings below.

### Findings

This section presents the key findings of this research. The findings are associated with the stakeholders' perspectives on the impacts of COVID-19 in tourism sub-sectors of the Lumbini area. 7 interviewees had participated in the interviews for this research. Among them are; a chairman of Siddhartha Regional Hotel Association, a general secretary of Lumbini Regional Hotel Association, a chairman of Nepal Association of Travel and Tour Agent (NATTA)- Province 5, a vice-president of West Nepal Bus Entrepreneurs Association, a member secretary of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), Assistant Professor of Lumbini Buddhist University and a resident who has also businesses at Bhairahawa.

According to Richter and Waugh (1986), tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and lodges are highly sensitive during the crisis that affects the external appearance and attraction to visitors with huge financial losses (Sanghai et al., 2020).

According to the Chairman of Siddhartha Regional Hotel Association, Krishna Shrestha (Pseudonym) believed,

*“The coronavirus lock-down has resulted in closing down of more than 67 hotels consisting of 3,464 rooms and 5,607 beds and about 3500 employees have lost their jobs. There has been an estimated loss of more than NRs. 2 billion in the last six months in Bhairahawa.*

Further, he added the following when asked about the investment and bank loan in the hotel sector in Rupandehi district.

*The total investment of more than NRs. 20 billion has been injected with bank loan NRs. 10 billion in hotels targeting the “Visit Nepal Year 2020” campaign.*

In addition to the above, the interviewee of the Lumbini Regional Hotel Association has its perspective on the impacts of COVID-19 in the hotel sector of the Lumbini area. According to the general secretary of Lumbini Regional Hotel Association, Ram Mani Sharma (Pseudonym) mentioned,

*“About 70% of the hotels booking mostly by the Chinese groups were canceled during the peak season of the year due to travel restriction and lockdown in the country. As a result, more than 85 hotels were shut down and about 4500 employees were sent home. There has been a loss of more than NRs. 1 billion in the hotel sector in Lumbini”.*

Similarly, tour and travel agencies are severely disturbed in the COVID-19, as social distance and travel restriction remain the main strategy to regulate the spread of the pandemic. This has resulted to terminate most of the bookings for summer and upcoming autumn. According to the chairman of NATTA- province-5, Suman Adhikari (Pseudonym),

*“It is estimated that there are about 171 tour and travel agencies and 11 tourist transport entrepreneurs operated in the province-5 of Nepal with 350 employees. The COVID-19 lock-down has led to a loss of more than NRs. 2 billion in the last six months. The unemployment percentage has grown-up and the livelihood of people who are directly or indirectly dependent on tour and travel has been affected”.*

More, he also added the following when asked about other impacts.

*“The pandemic has also hindered the different projects planned by NATTA–province-5 i.e. welcome center for tourists at Belahiya border point with an estimated investment of NRs. 400 million”.*

In the someway, tourism transportation is a key stakeholder of Nepal’s tourism in-term of capital investment and services. But, the COVID-19 lock-down has challenged a lot of problems in the transportation sectors in the country (Online KTM, 2020). According to Rajan Sharma (Pseudonym) –vice-president of West Nepal Bus Entrepreneur Association, Butwal assumed,

*“The transportation sector in Lumbini has been severely affected by the coronavirus lock-down. There have been estimated losses of more than NRs. 2 billion in the transportation sector as 2500 buses were remained stable without providing service for the last 6 months. More than 10,000 jobs in the transportation sector were affected.*

Besides, he added the following when asked about investment in tourist buses.

*“The transport entrepreneurs in Lumbini have also invested NRs. 1 billion in super deluxe buses aimed to support the “Visit Nepal Year 2020” campaign but the COVID-19 has brought everything into unpredicted losses”.*

The above stakeholders’ perspectives are also supported by the member secretary of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), Shree Ram Pandey (Pseudonym),

*“As the effect of COVID-19 is still ongoing and the government has not given permission to open the religious sites, the Lumbini sites will also remain closed for visitors until the connectivity of flights will not be feasible & the terror will not minimize. This has also slumped revenues of Lumbini Development Trust”.*

Besides, he also added the following when asked about other impacts.

*“The coronavirus pandemic has also impacted the construction of Gautam Buddha International airport at Bhairahawa and International conference hall in Lumbini planned to finish in 2020”*

The private schools, colleges, and universities are facing financial difficulties due to interruption in the academic enrollment with the pandemic in Lumbini. The researcher tried to collect the perception of the impacts of COVID-19 from the Assistant professor of Bachelor in Travel and Tourism Management (BTTM) at Lumbini Buddhist University, Ramesh Aryal (Pseudonym),

*“We have been running our tourism program at Lumbini and Butwal in province-5 of Nepal. The COVID-19 has resulted to convert the on-campus lecturing to online that had affected many students as only limited are connected to virtual learning. The COVID-19 has bothered campus exams, employees, meetings, and other academic activities”.*

The behavior of people is influenced by several factors such as personal, economic well-being, change in cost, and health risks, which is the result of pandemic (Lee & Chen, 2011). The health and disease risk create mental pressure among the people that affect the decision making of the travelers (Schneidge, 2020). According to local person Dipak Chhetri (Pseudonym) expressed,

*“We are still in a struggling phase and the COVID-19 had not only led to financial burden like we were unable to pay wages to employees and rent in time but we have also faced unseen mental stress in the daily lives. Everywhere whether it is a cellphone, newspapers, television, pamphlets, social media it's all about coronavirus”.*

## **Discussions**

In this section, the author will discuss the results regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry in Lumbini and its premises. Although tourists are the main economic source in tourism, the coronavirus pandemic has created long-term uncertainty and economic threats on the tourism industry of Lumbini and its premises. The tourism destination, transportation, tourists' behavior, mass media, health, and security are the five factors that change after the crisis (Yang et al., 2008). The nation also suffers economically, socially, morally and spiritually, if the tourism industry cannot offer safe and fear-free travel experiences (Kunwar, 2016).



The different literature has also confirmed that the pandemic like COVID-19 has brought serious effects on the tourism industry causing socio-economic impacts in the country. However, it is highly debated whether the impacts of the crisis on the tourism industry would disappear in a short period or not?

In a crisis, tourist and tourism businesses are more exposed to risk than anything else (Drabek, 1995). According to Ghaderi et al., (2015), crisis creates unexpected fear and uncertainty in tourism leading to massive loss of life and physical damage in the destination. The COVID-19 infection is not only limited to human transmission but has infected harshly economic structure, socio-cultural formation, and living of people (Ulak, 2020). The restrictions created by the COVID-19 pandemic such as social distance, isolation, and home quarantine have affected traveler's mobility (Paudel & Subedi, 2020). The 10,000 tourists who had entered Nepal before the lockdown were also left trapped in different parts of Nepal (Adventure Bound Nepal, 2020). The right to travel and enjoy the service of hospitality and tourism has been reduced in an unparalleled way (Baum & Hai, 2020). Thus, the special campaign named “#Travel tomorrow” has become the common advice to the current crisis underlining the long-term values of tourism (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). The result of this research indicates that Chinese tourists who desired to visit Lumbini in March and April have decreased with the outbreak of COVID-19. The situation has resulted to cancel holiday bookings, hotel reservations, extensive unemployment, loss in income sources, and promotion activities in Lumbini and its premises. The mega projects like Gautam Buddha International Airport at Bhairahawa and the International Conference Hall in Lumbini are expected to delay because of a shortage of materials and technicians who were not able to return to Nepal during the worldwide lockdown (Subba, 2020). Similarly, the road expansion of Bhairahawa to Lumbini is also much more disturbed by the coronavirus that would make inconvenience for tourist arrivals soon.

The World Health Organization (WHO) listed Nepal as a country with a high-risk zone of COVID-19 that made Nepal ban all international flights from March 22, 2020. The travel restriction by the government of Nepal was put into action as a strategy to control the spread of COVID-19 infection, which tremendously affected tourism activities in Lumbini. This has created fear and insecure situation to travel in Lumbini and its sites. Thus, domestic and international tourism in Lumbini and its premises has been severely impacted by the COVID-19. According to a financial survey of 2019-2020, Lumbini was one of the most visited places in Nepal with an estimated revenue of US\$ one hundred forty-five thousand in the fiscal year 2019-2020 (LDT, 2020). But, from February to August 2020, Lumbini has lost more than eight hundred thousand tourists in the major visiting time of the year due to the travel restriction and lock-down in the country (Paudel, 2020). The economic impacts of crises arise because of the efforts of government such as lock-down and travel restrictions (Kuo et



al., 2009). The hotel, restaurants, tour and travel agencies, souvenir shops, recreation groups, aviation service, tourism transport association, local businesses, in Lumbini areas are shut down since March 24, 2020, causing tourism entrepreneurs in a line to bankruptcy. Hence, the huge investment in tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises is at risk. The tourism industry of Lumbini characterizes small workers, guides, souvenir shops, and ground handlers like a tourist bus, car services are severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The postponing of the "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign and interruption of on-arrival visas along with countrywide lockdown has resulted in thousands of tourism jobs at risk in Lumbini (Prasain, 2020). Thus, the tourism industry in Lumbini and its sites have experienced diverse impacts since the coronavirus lock-down occurred in Nepal. Therefore, a clear strategy is necessary to address the problem of tourism entrepreneurs and employers in Lumbini and its premises.

There are around 152 star and tourist standard hotels registered in regional hotel association Nepal (RHAN) in Siddharthanagar and Lumbini, which are seriously affected, as there had not been any business in the hospitality sector in the last six months. There has been an estimated loss of more than NRs. 3 billion in the hotel and restaurant sector in Lumbini and its premises since the lock-down started. The pandemic has not only affected the tourism business but also people who were, directly and indirectly, dependent on the tourism industry in Lumbini, and its sites have been seriously impacted. The coronavirus crisis has impacted severely as thousands of employees working in Lumbini areas were sent home affecting their jobs. It has impacted mostly on the daily wages of staff and employees in Lumbini areas that have made difficulty to manage their daily necessities. Therefore, to cope with this situation; the government of Nepal has declared relief packages so that the tourism business can sustain it in the crisis. But it has been tough to obtain these supports in time due to difficult bureaucratic frameworks, centralized power, and unclear guidelines of the government.

Likewise, tour and travel agencies provide tourism services to the public on behalf of the suppliers such as airlines, cruise lines, package tours, car hires, and local transports, etc. There are altogether 171 tour and travel agencies operated in the Lumbini and its premises, which are seriously affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The main attractions of Lumbini and its sites are temples, architecture monasteries, museums, stupas, central canal, eternal peace flame located in Lumbini, Kapilavastu, Ramagram, and Devadaha. But, these attractions have been closed for the last six months and there is no indication when will the religious and pilgrim sites will re-open again. The tour and travel agencies are closed, as the mobility of tourists is controlled in Lumbini areas. The number of international and domestic tourists who visited Lumbini in 2019 was 1.5 million and there was a huge number

of tourist arrivals in January 2020. But, despite traveler's eager to visit Lumbini areas, the health, and safety concern has changed their travel plan. Hence, Lumbini has lost masses of tourists since the last six months of the coronavirus pandemic. While the author interviewed the chairman, the respondent stated that the pandemic has led to job losses of many employees on tour and travel in Lumbini areas disturbing their livelihood. The tour and travel groups are not in line to sustain due to lock-down and restriction in tourism mobility in Lumbini. Thus, this has impacted severely holiday bookings and travel packages during the high season of the year in Lumbini and sites.

The transportation is also one of the main elements in any emergency preparation and response (Masozera et al., 2006). However, tourism segments such as air transport, cruises, public transport, and railways services are immediately affected by the outbreak of pandemic (Gössling et al., 2020). In the context of Lumbini and its premises, there are about 2500 public buses and eleven-tourist transport entrepreneurs, which are being seriously affected by the COVID-19 lock-down and travel restrictions imposed by the government. As argued by the respondent, the transportation sector in Lumbini and sites had encountered huge financial difficulties and job losses of many employees that have impacted economic and social development. The coronavirus has made trouble for transport entrepreneurs to survive in the business world in Lumbini as it gets affected immediately with the pandemic and takes maximum time to restart. Thus, there is a need for better teamwork with the tourism stakeholders and the local government to support the transport sector in Lumbini and sites with survival and restart package.

The World Bank and the international monetary fund have declared the coronavirus pandemic as the biggest financial crisis after 1930 in the world that has impacted the academic sector (Bajracharya et al., 2020). It is expected that the majority of universities and institutions in Lumbini and its premises can be re-open, but the social gathering should remain limited to less than 25 people in the situation of COVID-19. Therefore, it is not possible to open schools, institutions in Lumbini areas as they have been placed in a risk zone. The coronavirus is going to hamper the academic activities of about one hundred thousand students in Lumbini areas this year. The Private and Boarding School Organization Nepal (PABSON) Rupandehi has decided to begin a digital education system to continue the teaching-learning process. This has further troubled many students, as they do not have proper internet access. Most of the universities, schools in Lumbini sites are closed for the last six months and the private schools, colleges, and universities are facing financial difficulties due to the interruption in the academic enrollment of students. The final exam, which was supposed to finish in late March and April month by universities in Lumbini and sites, were been postponed until further notice (Lumbini Times, 2020).

The COVID-19 has brought serious psychological impacts such as pain, fear, frustration, loneliness, and nervousness among the public, students, and health workers around the world. The pandemic has shown that the sudden economic fall, unemployment, social distance, and economic suffering had led to a significant rise in the number of people committing suicide (Paudel & Subedi, 2020). Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people physically, mentally, socially, financially, and emotionally in Lumbini and its premises. The livelihood of local and businessman in Lumbini and its sites has been disturbed a lot because of the COVID-19 lockdown and restriction to keep the business close down. However, it is a prime responsibility of the government to provide mental health counseling to the public through phone and other media to reduce the risk to mental health.

Although the Government of Nepal had permitted to operate aviation sector, hotel, and restaurants, trekking and transportation through following the health and safety procedures from September 17, 2020, the religious and pilgrims' sites are still not in a phase of operation and these could create a huge amount of losses in the destination like Lumbini.

The significant literature and results of this research also clarify that tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises have been extremely impacted by the COVID-19 causing multiple effects in tourism-related business, social structure, and daily lives of people. The seven of the interviewees of this research also responded that there have been huge losses in the tourism sectors in Lumbini and its premises since the last six months of coronavirus lock-down. However, at the moment the supports from the central government, Lumbini developments trust, and local government are important to tackle the financial and other problems faced by the tourism business in Lumbini and its premises.

### **Conclusion**

This research tried to investigate the impacts of COVID-19 in tourism from the viewpoint of Lumbini and its premises. The COVID-19 pandemic had created huge impacts on the tourism industry of Lumbini and its premises particularly when Nepal had planned the "Visit Nepal Year 2020" campaign. The tourism entrepreneurs in Lumbini areas have lost their confidence because of the financial and mental burden created through the countrywide lock-down. However, it is also appreciated that lock-down is not a permanent solution for the elimination of crisis. The different on-going projects on the tourism sector in Lumbini have been postponed.

Although, the tourism sector of Lumbini is heavily affected by pandemic the mobilization of people will never end forever, as Lumbini is a holy zone and is based on authenticity. Thus, the revival will take place sooner or later after the pandemic. There was also a different crisis in the past in the tourism sector like an earthquake,

Tsunami, SARS, Ebola, etc. but were eliminated with time, and hence tourism was recovered. The different travel policies will be developed by the tourism sectors in near future to inspire tourists' to travel. The religious and pilgrimage tourism will also continue to re-start sooner or later as the Lumbini Development Trust (LDC), Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), and Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MOCTCA) are engaged together in formulating health and safety protocols to resume the spiritual tourism. However, as the coronavirus outbreak is still ongoing, therefore, the first concern is to focus on the health and security of people through ignoring unnecessary travels and maintaining social distance.

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**THE GAZE**  
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## Tourism Governance in the aftermath of COVID-19: A Case Study of Nepal

**Prakash Chandra Neupane**

Nepal Kasthamadap College, Kalanki, Kathmandu

*npnprakash75@gmail.com*

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### Abstract

*The global pandemic of COVID 19 has had a severe effect in various developing economies, including Nepal itself, as it has seriously engulfed the strongest economies of the world. The tourism industry globally has been paralyzed, and it will take long ahead to get the industry back on track. There are challenges to revive this industry and ensure its tremendous contribution to revitalizing the ailed tourism sector. To drive this situation more efficiently and tactfully, the need for good governance through its leading agencies seem to be much demanding and prevailing. Visit Nepal 2020 has been postponed by the Nepal government due to the potential risk of an outbreak of COVID -19 and almost all the government efforts have now been centralized to combat the threat of COVID-19. Both domestic and international tourism is in its complete halt, creating a massive shortfall on revenue generation in the national economy. To combat the spread of COVID-19 into the community level and thus checking the further loss of lives and property, series of lockdown at the national level were imposed restraining the public mobility,*

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### Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
*kunwar.dr@gmail.com*

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*factories, and industries are closed for indefinitely leaving the tourism activities completely at coma. As the tourism industry globally has come to a halt now, stopping all the tourism-based activities resulting cut off of a heavy chunk of revenue, it's a high time to think over the noble strategies on what might be the forms and modality of governance in tourism sector globally.*

### Introduction

Tourism is an important economic sector for many countries around the world and governments are developing active and innovative policies to promote sustainable and inclusive tourism growth. The linkages between tourism and other policies are many, and policy decisions need to consider the trade-offs and complementarities (OECD, 2017).

Tourism stands on the foundation of movement and mobility of the people for learning, exposure to new places, things, and culture. The mobility as a basic condition of the tourism industry has now been compromised due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the same has been reflected in the Nepalese perspective as well.

Tourism industry christened as a “fickle” industry, “seasonal” industry, “peace” industry, one of the “largest” industries, and so on (Kunwar, 2010, p.12; in Ulak, 2020:109). Tourism plays an important role in enhancing a nation's business activity, income, foreign currency earnings, and the creation of jobs. Thus, the tourism industry tends to be highly sensitive to negative environmental factors such as natural disasters, epidemics, serious social conflicts, war, economic crises, and terrorism acts (Hung, et al., 2007; in Ulak, 2020: 109). As a result, these kinds of events influence tourism mobility and traveler's motivation to travel which will have lasting effects on the tourism industry. The outbreak of coronavirus also has developed a fear of travelers.

The tourism industry of Nepal has been facing many crises and obstacles since its inception. Nepal has been officially open for international tourists since 1951 (MoCTCA, 2014). There have been crises and disasters which have directly affected the tourism industry of Nepal in a different period (see table.1). The sector was hard hit by earthquake, trade blockade in the year 2015; now it is COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 1: Negative events and its impacts in the tourism industry of Nepal (2015-2020)**

Negative Events	Year	Tourism Decline
Catastrophic Earthquake	2015	33%
Trade Disruptions along the southern border	2015	
COVID-19 Pandemics		N/A

*Source: Economic Impact, Asian Development Bank (2019)*

Well awaited national campaign of visit Nepal 2020 has been postponed by the government to all focus its strengths and efforts to combat the potential risks of spreading COVID-19 and help people save their life and property. Tourism as a principal contributor of revenue into the national economy is being driven by the certain leading practices practised by both government and non-government agencies and entities. To bring the hard-hit tourism sector globally into normal and to ensure its continued contribution to the global economy, it has been the dire need of time to think its comeback from a new dimension. All the formal and informal sectors in the tourism industry need to initiate a worthy dialogue and discussion on how the paralyzed tourism sector could flourish again as normal. And as a remedy of this ailment, entry of good governance practice in tourism sector seems a must.

### **Literature review**

Over the last three decades the notion of ‘*governance*’ has drawn attention by policy makers and scholars from different disciplines, such as political science, public administration, and economics. Even though there is no consensus on the definition of governance, relevant studies have claimed some stylized facts that reflect the term. A pioneer study among them states that governance relates to “*interdependence between organizations, resource-exchange, game-like interactions between network members and autonomy from the state*” (Rhodes, 1999:1246; in POLAT,2020).

In general sense, “governance” means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance, and local governance. Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision (United Nations Economic and Social commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (World Bank, n.d).

Siakwah, Musavengane&Leonard(2019)noted that “Governance though not easily defined can promote effective and equitable resources use and development (Duran, 2013; p.2). According to Hall (2011) governance is associated with the act of governing, “the search to understand forms of State action to mediate social and economic development, and political problems at a time when the State itself has

changed". This change begins by inserting new stakeholders into the development process, which goes beyond government issues.

In Wan and Bramwell's (2015) perspective, governance involves both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders who work collectively toward a common goal or social order. The role of coordinating new challenges is attributed to the State.

Valente, Dredge, and Lohmann (2015) define governance as a process that guarantees greater transparency, accountability, efficacy, efficiency, participation, and legitimacy which can be reached through public-private agreements.

The concept of tourism governance is not new, despite a lack of consensus on how to define it, which is perhaps why it is often mistaken for the government. It emerged in the 1970s during the governability crisis to understand whether the new administrative structures, through their processes, could establish consensus and solve conflicts (Coutinho & Nóbrega, 2019, p. 56).

Governance is a concept that should be understood as a process involving coordination, collaboration, and the cooperation of stakeholders, to ensure the multiplier effects from the social and environmental development of tourism in the local economy (Siakwah, Musavengane, & Leonard, 2019).

Governance is the set of tasks such as decision making, enforcement of decisions, communication of rules, and measurement of performance that allow these functions of a system to proceed (Laws, Agrusa, Scott, & Richins, 2011).

Governance in the tourism sector is especially important because it is not a single industry but instead "cuts across different fields of experience and administrative frontiers". Tourism, therefore, faces the difficulty of ensuring collaboration between a variety of stakeholders and of working within complex existing governance arrangements. Tourism requires collaboration not only between the levels of governance but also across public, private, and local community institutions (World Tourism Organization & Griffith University, 2017).

Wan and Bramwell's (2015) perspective, as cited by Coutinho & Nobrega (2019), governance involves both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders who work collectively toward a common goal or social order. The role of coordinating new challenges is attributed to the State.

Concretely, "good governance" with its ingredients has been a cornerstone for sustainable development. In this context; scholars, policymakers and authorities have overwhelmingly focused on governance relevant policy tools both empirically and theoretically (Kaufmann and Kraay; 2007:2 in POLAT, 2020).

Governance has now been rebranded as "good governance" nowadays. It has become quite a more trendy term, especially for the development agencies both from

home and abroad. More precisely, it's used to indicate and gauge the success and failure of government in terms of decision making, its implementation, and the level of public satisfaction through the development efforts carried out by the government.

Good governance is a process of taking and implementing government decisions effectively. It is a process or mechanism through which political, economic, and administrative authority is exercised well in the conduct of public affairs. The concept of good governance emerged in the late 1980s to address governments' failures in development policies, including failure to alleviate poverty, combat corruption, and respect human rights. Both good governance and human rights are based on the common principles of participation, accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, rule of law, and responsibility (Regmi, 2020).

Governance is a multi-faceted concept and along with its multi-scalar nature in tourism, this helps to explain the plurality of approaches that have been taken in understanding, firstly, the nature of governance in tourism, and, secondly, how to govern the tourism industry effectively. Governance is not simply the act of governing, or the activities associated solely with formal institutions of governance such as national and local government, national tourism offices, and destination management organizations. Rather, the governance of tourism involves an increasingly networked set of inter-relationships between actors in the public, private and third sectors and should bring together tourists, host communities, businesses and the traditional institutions of the state with an interest in tourism, to achieve the sustainable management of tourism within and between destinations. Effective governance is a fundamental condition for the sustainable development of tourist destinations (Antonio & Kennell, 2019).

All these definitions share a tendency to understand governance as either a process that is inherent to the government or a way to govern. However, Velasco Gonzalez (2013) understands governance to be a decision-making organizational procedure that includes more than just government actions.

Although tourism destination governance has been a subject of academic inquiry for some time now, in practice, governance is still a challenge for many tourism destinations around the world. Adaptive co-management (ACM) is a dynamic approach to governance whereby institutional arrangements and ecological knowledge are continually revised through a process of 'learning-by-doing'. Founded on the active participation and collaboration of diverse stakeholder groups, ACM has been used extensively in the governance of natural resource contexts and so may offer valuable synergies for tourism governance; particularly the governance of tourism in protected areas (Adaptive co-management: A novel approach to tourism destination governance?, 2018).

“In order to develop and apply policies for tourism in destinations, there is usually a requirement for knowledge, thought, the application of power, resources and rules, and also coordination and cooperation among numerous actors. Together, these are key features of governance (Bramwell, 2011, p.459-477; in Dangi & Petrick; 2021).

As cited in (Coutinho & Nóbrega,2019), (Hall, 2011; Velasco Gonzalez, 2013; Nóbrega & Figueiredo, 2014; Wan & Bramwell, 2015; Valente, Dredge & Lohmann, 2015; Qian et al., 2016; Tretin, 2016), opine that in addition to building consensus in conflict situations, tourism governance also brings benefits such as efficiency, efficacy, fairness, transparency, accountability, cooperation, and legitimacy, given that it involves collective decision-making through political democracy with social participation represented by diverse interests. These benefits have been widely discussed and have formed the basis of political, social, and business discourses.

(Coutinho & Nóbrega,2019; in Castells, 2000) comes up as governance provides a series of benefits based on cooperation, it is not exempt from power relations, i.e., the essence of State organized society Tourism.

Dangi&Petrick(2021) propose for making tourism governance more proactive, collaborative, and facilitative to better address the issues of justice, ethics, and equity and to contribute to sustainable tourism development due to the vulnerability of the sustainable tourism paradigm amongst the setting of open-market economy and liberal democracy like in the United States.

The literature points out that the term tourism governance is related to how to govern, which implies resizing command and control by the State, which then begins to include new stakeholders in the decision-making process through new decision-making structures, mechanisms, and procedures regarding tourism planning and operations (Coutinho & Nóbrega, 2019, p. 63).

Discrepancies between national government structures and local government perspectives often tend to create a space for the dominance of local, private interests rather than on strategies that lead to socially fair development which takes into account the needs of residents.( Antonio & Kennell, 2019).

World Trade Organization (2013) highlights that successful tourism depends on having destinations that are attractive and welcoming. Government and management requirements for achieving the aim include having in place:

- policies that are relevant and coherent across government, in the overall areas of sustainable development, tourism, and the environment;
- clear and supportive governance structures at all levels that involve and benefit from the engagement of the private sector and other stakeholders;
- sound planning and integrated management of coasts, including coastal tourism;



- effective processes to assess and influence new tourism development;
- tourism operations that pursue sound environmental management practices and seek benefit local communities;
- tourism-related actions to improve the attractiveness and conservation of coastal environments
- actions to deliver more benefits to local communities from tourism.

### **Purpose and method of study**

The main purpose of this study is to study the governance aspects considered in the tourism industry, basically for its sustainability. Having studied the governance in a general sense, later it has been focused on the global tourism sector and on the line to what extent it's being practiced in Nepalese perspective.

The study is exploratory that follows a qualitative method of analysis. The study is based on secondary data through desk research. The data are extracted from published journals, articles, and renowned media coverage sources.

As it is a desk research, the first-hand experience of governance is lacking but still, it will highlight the loops and gaps of governance in the tourism sector to pave the way for future endeavors, for both public and private sectors.

This article will evolve a discussion to even consider the rethink and revision of existing strategies, plans and policies, and the structural setting of the organizations being involved in the tourism sector.

### **Indicators of governance**

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project reports aggregate and individual governance indicators for over 200 countries and territories over the period 1996–2018, for six dimensions of governance:

- Voice and Accountability
- Political Stability and Absence of Violence
- Government Effectiveness
- Regulatory Quality
- Rule of Law
- Control of Corruption

These aggregate indicators combine the views of a large number of enterprises, citizens, and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries. They are based on over 30 individual data sources produced by a variety of survey institutes, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and private sector firms (World Bank, n.d).



Even though there was limited set of empirical indicators of governance initially, the growing interest in gauging governance by policy-relevant indicators has intended scholars to analyze more purified and policy-relevant governance indicators (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2007:2; in POLAT, 2020).

UNDP(2007; in POLAT,2020)conceptualizes governance indicators based on what is being measured, namely; input/rights/commitment/dejure, process/responsibility/defacto, and output/outcome/enjoyment/performance/de facto. Indicators in the first group reflect to commitments by the countries, the second group covers indicators “whether parties were taking action to fulfil their responsibilities and commitments” and the third group comprises of “data about the number of people enjoying their rights and figures about those who are not enjoying their rights” UNDP (2007:10; in POLAT, 2020).

Among policy-relevant governance indicators, the WGIs are commonly used and associate 6 dimensions of governance, namely: Voice and accountability (VA), Political stability and absence of violence (PV), Government effectiveness (GE), Regulatory quality (RQ), Rule of law (RL) and Control of corruption (CC). These indicators are constructed corresponding to three areas, such as the process by which governments are selected, monitored, and replaced (VA and PV), The capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound world policies (GE and RL) and The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2010:4; in POLAT,2020).

### **Governance & sustainable tourism**

Governance has been considered by the experts as one of the basic requirements for tourism destinations if to enhance sustainable tourism fruitfully.

Sustainability seemed to emerge as a central theme and a guiding principle for development for governments, businesses, and other private organizations, following the WECD initiative. The notion of sustainability, however, had existence in both theory and practice long before this event. (Bramwell, 2011,p.459-477; in Dangi& Petrick;2021 ).

The role of the central government in developing cohesive, effective tourism policy is vital, but governments face numerous challenges in crafting this policy (Tourism trends and policy priorities, 2016) This is due in part to the fragmented nature of tourism which requires multiple central government ministries and different levels of government to undertake various roles in response to political, social, environmental, and technological trends affecting tourism For example, governments are involved in tourism in a variety of capacities

including, marketing and promotion; border security; the regulation of markets such as aviation; planning regulations; controlling or managing tourism attractions such as national parks; skills development; and funding the development of roads and other infrastructure. Besides, in many countries, there is an added level of complexity in that the full competence for tourism does not reside with the central government. As such, there is often a significant role to be played in tourism governance at the subnational level (OECD, 2017, p. 3).

“Destinations wanting to promote sustainable tourism are more likely to be successful when there is effective governance. Normally, this involves having good mechanisms for the coordination of collective action (Butler, 2010; (Bramwell, 2011, p. 461). (Hall, 2008; in Bramwell, 2011) opines one difficulty for the governance of sustainable tourism is that its concerns cut across sectors and span diverse policy domains, such as planning, transport, climate change, employment, and regional development. Sustainable tourism policies need to be integrated with wider economic, social, and environmental policy considerations within an overall sustainable development framework.

The development of effective tourism policy is a challenging task for several reasons. Tourism is an “open” industry and subject to political, social, environmental, and technological trends to which it must respond. Due to its fragmented nature, it requires coordination of government, at the national and sub-national level, as well as private sector businesses that both compete and co-operate with one another. Tourism services are primarily provided by micro, small, and medium-size suppliers, although some sectors, such as aviation, are dominated by large businesses operating on a global scale. Besides, governments are involved in tourism in a variety of capacities including, border security; the regulation of markets such as aviation; controlling or managing tourism attractions such as national parks; and funding the development of roads and other infrastructure. Coutinho & Nóbrega (2019) as cited in Castells (2000) suggests although tourism governance provides a series of benefits based on cooperation, it is not exempt of power relations, i.e., the essence of State organized society. Tourism, therefore, imposes numerous challenges, given its idiosyncrasies, because on the one hand there are profit-seeking private interests involved, and on the other hand, it requires shared actions, especially within and among tourist destinations (Velasco Gonzalez, 2013).

### **Recent governance practices in the tourism industry**

Governments at all levels have an important role to play in the delivery of the tourism product, and they need to work in close partnership with the private sector. To sustain tourism growth and the associated benefits, governments must ensure that the right policies and delivery structures are in place. Many countries now have multi-

year policies and plan to develop the tourism sector and to give strategic direction and focus to government policy at the national and sub-national levels.

Governance has been observed as a trendy terminology over its evolution and now has been moved towards “good governance” following wider advocacy in recent days by the international development agencies, especially by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and World Bank. They are much focused and concerned about coordination, participation, transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and responsibility in terms of resource utilization. And the unique combination of these all constitute, what they have been calling as good governance.

Effective governance practices include i) a clear definition of the roles and functions of the various levels of government in tourism; ii) the engagement of the tourism industry and civil society in the policy decision-making process; iii) the adopting effective engagement mechanisms to bring together the various actors (e.g. tourism strategies, contracts, joint committees), and ensure they have the appropriate tools and resources for implementation and monitoring (OECD, 2017, p. 4).

Effective governance practices must reflect the changing business and policy environment, and the evolving roles and competencies of government tourism organizations. Developments in the macro policy environment favor a more collaborative approach, encouraging policy development in conjunction with the tourism industry, as well as an emphasis on regional or local level decision-making (OECD, 2012). Governance in the tourism sector is especially important because it is not a single industry but instead “cuts across different fields of experience and administrative frontiers (World Tourism Organization, 2013). Tourism, therefore, faces the difficulty of ensuring collaboration between a variety of stakeholders and of working within complex existing governance arrangements. Tourism requires collaboration not only between the levels of governance but also across public, private, and local community institutions. In China, national government policy is that local government should create and implement rural tourism policies for local communities, plan and provide technical support for innovative programs. Government policy encourages financial organizations to increase loans to villages and gives priority to developing products for leisure tourism in annual land-use planning. It also requires improvement in transportation, water and electricity, pollution reduction, and wireless network infrastructure. It has also implemented a digital management system to guide and provide information broadcasts to visitors, as well as real-time collection and monitoring of visitor flows. In 2005 and 2006, Jiangxiang Village benefited from a special fund created by the Changshu Government for the construction of general infrastructure (UNWTO & Griffith University, 2017, p. 50).

With its rich natural and cultural heritage, the Philippine Government has identified tourism as “as an engine of socio-economic growth and cultural affirmation to generate investment, foreign exchange and employment and to continue to mould an enhanced sense of national pride for all Filipinos”<sup>1</sup>. The Republic Act 9593 mandates the Philippine Department of Tourism to plan, coordinate, and regulate the development and promotion of the tourism industry development at the national level. Nevertheless, the local government unit has a strategic role in planning and managing tourism development in their areas of jurisdiction.

The Tourism Act emphasizes that national and local governments have shared responsibilities in tourism development planning, collection of tourism statistics, and accreditation of tourism-related enterprises. The Department of Tourism is responsible for national tourism policy and planning, international and domestic marketing, the accreditation of tourism enterprises, and maintaining a national databank of tourism statistics and information. The Department supports the local government units in building their capacity for tourism activities.

On the other hand, the local government units under the Local Government Code 2 of 1991 continue to be responsible for issuing business licenses for the operation of tourist enterprises, the inclusion of tourism in their Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) and zoning ordinances, ensuring safety and security in partnership with the Philippine National Police (PNP) and other agencies, and undertaking promotions activities designed to attract tourists to their area (UNWTO & Griffith University, 2017). In Brazil, the approach to tourism governance has been based on structuring and organizing tourism in a given region by grouping municipalities together, thus reinforcing articulation through networks. With this, institutions have now begun to organize into inter-organizational networks as a result of the rationality of a new social, cultural, and political dynamics of a given region (Coutinho & Nóbrega, 2019).

### **Approaches to tourism governance**

Tourism governance is all about keeping plans and policies in place and implementing those policies for the better cause of ensuring considerable contribution by the tourism sector on the national and global economy. It additionally ensures the coordinated efforts of the governing bodies established and run for the smooth functioning of the tourism industry. Tourism governance, by virtue, is not a quantifiable aspect rather statistics indicating the appropriate functioning of the sector would all be possible by the tourism governance itself.

Developing a multi-actor system that includes public-private partnerships and greater horizontal and vertical coordination of relevant government bodies requires consideration of the accepted elements of good governance, both at the central and sub-national levels. Governance can also be improved through both institutional and

human capacity building, ensuring institutions have a well-defined objective and clear mandates, and effective leadership and political support. Mechanisms to improve co-ordination between central and sub-national governments include the development of tourism strategies, the use of contracts, and the creation of joint committees. At an industry level, governments are encouraging the development of a single peak tourism industry association to facilitate more co-ordinated industry representation. Mechanisms to manage the interface with industry include the establishment of representative associations and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) that provide a forum for co-operation and policy debate (OECD, 2012, p. 13).

Most tourism plans addressing sustainability adopt a triple bottom line approach, incorporating economic, social, and environmental elements. However, no matter how economically positive, socially acceptable, or environmentally friendly tourism plans may be, the support from organizations at all levels is critical for their implementation (McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver & Wheeler, 2013).

Although tourism destination governance has been a subject of academic inquiry for some time now, in practice, governance is still a challenge for many tourism destinations around the world.

#### **Adaptive co-management (ACM) model**

ACM is a dynamic approach to governance whereby institutional arrangements and ecological knowledge are continually revised through a process of 'learning-by-doing'. Founded on the active participation and collaboration of diverse stakeholder groups, ACM has been used extensively in the governance of natural resource contexts and so may offer valuable synergies for tourism governance; particularly the governance of tourism in protected areas (Islam, Ruhanen, & Ritchie, 2018).

#### **Private-public partnership (PPP) model**

The development of tourism in emerging economies have been shaped by many factors among which Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) play a key role as they bring together government agencies and the public sector with representatives of the whole tourism value chain under the same goals of promoting socioeconomic development, sustainability, job creation and international competitiveness through tourism (WTO, 2015 in Badal, 2020).

PPPs bring together stakeholders with different objectives and skills, and resources in a formal or informal voluntary partnership to improve the attractiveness of a regional destination, its productivity, associated market efficiency, and the overall management of tourism. PPPs target improvement in many aspects necessary for successful tourism such as transportation, events, accommodation, attractions,

business skills and resource protection. Hence, PPPs are important, and often vital, elements in the establishment of tourism based initiatives and the improvement of the market competitiveness of destinations.

An alternative institution, a public-private partnership, is often used in a tourism destination to provide governance arrangements for certain tasks; usually such things as destination marketing and promotion through cross-sectoral collaboration. Organizations of this type may be called a DMO (Destination Marketing Organization or Destination Management Organization depending on its main tasks) (UNWTO & Griffith University, 2017, p. 38).

### **The whole of government approach**

Governments at all levels have an important role to play in the delivery of the tourism product, and they need to work in close partnership with the private sector. In order to sustain tourism growth and the associated benefits, governments must ensure that the right policies and delivery structures are in place. Many countries now have multi-year policies and plans to develop the tourism sector and to give strategic direction and focus to government policy at national and subnational level (OECD, 2017).

Many countries consider an integrated whole-of-government approach to tourism as an essential component of a supportive government framework. These integrated approaches increase the policy coherence and the effectiveness of public and public/private actions in tourism. (OECD, 2017).

For whole-of-government policy approaches to be effective, they should recognize the importance of strong government-industry-civil society dialogue in the development, implementation, and monitoring phases. Developing a multi-actor system, that includes the private sector and civil society and greater horizontal and vertical coordination of relevant government bodies, requires consideration of the accepted elements of good governance, both at the central and subnational levels (OECD, 2017).

### **COVID-19 vs global tourism industry**

The tourism sector is currently one of the hardest-hit by the outbreak of COVID-19, with impacts on both travel supply and demand. This represents an added downside risk in the context of a weaker world economy geopolitical, social and trade tensions, as well as uneven performance among major outbound travel markets. As of today, UNWTO estimates that in 2020 global international tourist arrivals could decline between 20-30%, down from an estimated growth of 3% to 4% forecast in early January 2020.

- This could translate into a loss of US\$ 30 to 50 billion in spending by international visitors (international tourism receipts).

- Estimates for other world regions are currently premature given the rapidly evolving situation.

(Tourism & COVID -19, 2020)

Within the last three months, the COVID-19 has gone global and turned into a 'pandemic' affecting around 200 countries. With no vaccine in place, the one-third of humanity is under lockdown, as it is the only measure of prevention available to the world and is assumed to go for as long as six months in many countries. This might prevent the virus, but it certainly would have a disastrous impact on the global economy.

The world economy is facing "severe" economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic that could be even more costly than the '2009 Financial Crisis'. The lockdown has been followed by a huge 'fall in demand' in the economy. This means that consumers are not consuming goods in the same capacity even though the products are available in the global economy. This trend is most visible in the travel and tourism industry. The first policies that came into place were that of the travel ban. Similar dynamics apply to other industries as well. This is the reason why economists have been contemplating whether the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to a global recession on the scale of the 2009 Financial Crisis or the 1930 Great Depression. To explain the gravity of the issue, some key figures related to the speculated global economy are given in the table below.

#### **Impact on the global economy**

Forecasted Global GDP Due to COVID 19 in 2020 – <b>2.4%</b>
Monetary GDP Loss in Best Case COVID 19 Scenario – <b>76.69bn USD</b>
Forecasted GDP Loss in the U.S. in a Global Pandemic Scenario – <b>2.4%</b>

#### **Impact on trade and tourism**

Projected global tourism revenue in 2020 – <b>568.58 bn USD</b>
Projected tourism revenue in Asia in 2020 – <b>164.7m USD</b>
Loss in global business travel revenue due to COVID 19 - <b>-810.7bn USD</b>
Global change in flight frequency as of March 23, 2020 - <b>-23.7%</b>

*Source: Statista, 2020*

Up to 75 million jobs are at immediate risk in global Travel & Tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

The alarming figure, based on research from WTTC, shows a punishing Travel & Tourism GDP loss to the world economy of up to US\$2.1 trillion in 2020. The latest projection of a 50% increase in jobs at risk, in less than two weeks, represents a



significant and worrying trend, with an astounding one million jobs being lost every day in the Travel & Tourism sector, due to the sweeping effect of the coronavirus pandemic (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020).

The analysis by WTTC, which represents the global Travel & Tourism private sector, also exposes the depth of the crisis for individual regions. Asia-Pacific is expected to be most heavily impacted with up to 49 million jobs at risk throughout the region, representing a loss of nearly US\$800 billion to Travel & Tourism GDP. The latest figures also suggest that in Europe, up to 10 million jobs in Travel & Tourism are at risk, totaling a loss of nearly US\$552 billion. Travel & Tourism contributes to 10.4% of Global GDP, is directly responsible for generating one in 10 of the world's jobs, and for eight successive years, has outpaced the growth of the global economy (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020).

### **Effects of COVID-19 in Nepalese tourism sector**

The tourism Industry of Nepal was gradually shifting from passive-impetus to active impetus. The hope of growth in the industry was high as there are many hotels and restaurant projects under-construction have been halted. However, Mega projects like Gautam Buddha International Airport in Lumbini, Pokhara Regional International Airport, Tribhuvan International Airport Capacity building, Fast-track road to Nijgadh, are under construction phase to cater to the tourism industry of Nepal. The government of Nepal has to cancel the very ambitious "Visit Nepal 2020" Campaign temporarily which was inaugurated in January 2020 as a national event targeting 2 million tourists by 2020, almost 100% increase compared to 2018. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB) Report (2019), the tourism industry has a distinctive place in Nepal's economy and the industry earns on an average of 25% of the total foreign exchange and provides direct employment to more than 200,000 people. The average direct tourism contribution to the national economy has hovered at 3.9% in the GDP from 2008-2018" (ADB, 2019). Nepal's economy has started suffering as a pinch from the initial phase of the outbreak of the virus. Nepal's tourism-based economy is being severely impacted due to travel restrictions imposed by Nepal and other countries, and airlines canceling flights (Subba, 2020 in Ulak 2020). China is the second-highest source of tourists in Nepal, and the Chinese have stopped traveling as China Government restricted traveling who contributed 20% to the hotel occupancy, have dwindled and travelers from other countries have also cut short their plan since the wake of an outbreak. The sector contributes 14.37 percent to the economy, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (Shrestha, 2020 cited in Ulak,2020).

Similarly, Nepal has also been affected adversely by the pandemic, and its preliminary impact recorded 14.37% loss to Nepalese economy as a repercussion of



travel restrictions and flight cancellations (Shrestha, 2020). Nepal's tourism industry generated NRs. 240.7 billion in 2018 that stood at 7.9 percent GDP (Prasain, 2019 cited in Ulak, 2020).

The contemporary situation of Nepal's tourism industry is significantly affected by COVID-19. Tourism is a seasonal industry (Kunwar, 2010 cited in Ulak 2020), April – March is the highest tourist season of Nepal but the industry has gone to coma because of COVID-19. The significant effect of this situation is yet to come and it requires a long time to cure. The Travel and Tourism Economic Impact (2019) report shows that the tourism industry of Nepal has been gradually expanding as the contribution of the tourism industry in GDP was a rise by NRs. 45.7 billion. The total contribution of the tourism industry to GDP in 2017 was NRs. 195 billion. Nepal Rastra Bank Report in Travel and Tourism Economic Impact (2019) shows that the total foreign currency exchange for 2018 stood at around 617,263 thousand US\$ which was almost 17% higher than in the year 2017. The average daily spending of tourists in Nepal is US\$ 44 (MoCTCA, 2019). There will be tourism nostalgia while looking at the comparative growth of the tourism industry of Nepal from the year 2012- 2017 (Ulak, 2020).

Nepal government had declared the year 2020 as visit Nepal year and its promotional activities were at full swing both inside the country and abroad. COVID-19 being declared as a global pandemic by WHO, its seriousness came as a shock to the rest of the world as the number of death tolls increased alarmingly at its full speed. With every new finding and sharing by WHO about the communication of COVID 19, the global tourism sector started to experience the downfall in terms of cancellation of booking for the numerous holiday destination, mountaineering expedition, and trekking and halting of tourism activities worldwide. The majority of the globe went for the lockdown, considering it as a proven tool to restrict the transmission of COVID-19. It resulted in the closure of all forms of transportation via. land, water, and air.

Nepal is starting to suffer the most abrupt and widespread cessation of economic activity due to widespread fears of a possible outbreak of this deadly respiratory pathogen that is capable of community transmission.

Service industries like tourism and hotels are being hit especially hard. Tourism was expected to drive Nepal's economic growth and contribute greatly to the high growth target of 8.5 percent that the government had set for this year, but this industry tends to have a little financial cushion. The contribution of the tourism sector to Nepal's economy stood at 7.9 percent in 2018, according to the report prepared by the World Travel and Tourism Council, which represents the private tourism industry and counts more than 200 company members. (Karki, 2020).

Although tourist arrivals saw only a slight drop to 101,400 in February, there was an 80% decrease in visitors from China. Official figures are not yet available for March and April, but the travel industry is reporting widespread cancellations. Many international conferences, sports and festival events have been postponed. Hotel occupancy rates are dropping at what should have been peak season. Trekking and mountaineering expeditions have gone ahead but there has been a 50% decline in the number of clients.

As fears about COVID-19 continue to grip the world, many countries have taken preventative measures by canceling events and gatherings. The government of Nepal has issued an appeal not to organize any large meetings, conferences, festivals, and any other events given the possible risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in the country. In response, organizers from three major events, from the film industries to sports have agreed to postpone or cancel their long-awaited programs (Shrestha, 2020).

The global pandemic has forced the Nepali government to cancel visit Nepal 2020, an ambitious campaign aimed at attracting 2 million foreign tourists to the economically disadvantaged mountainous country. When the campaign was first announced in 2018, the goal was to channel revenue generated through tourism toward Nepal's social and economic transformation as well as recouping the financial losses experienced as a result of the 2015 earthquakes. The Visit Nepal 2020 campaign had expected to boost Nepal's small economy – with a GDP of just \$30 billion GDP – by generating a predicted \$ 2 billion in tourist receipts and creating thousands of new jobs. It was to be the flagship campaign that steered Nepal's shaky but burgeoning economy away from rocky shores and into safer seas (Johnson, 2020).

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal is now faced with a very different and much harsher reality. Foreign tourists will no longer be flocking in to spend large sums of cash before leaving with fond memories and a few souvenirs. Instead, Nepal stands to potentially see millions of now-unemployed nationals returning home from abroad (Johnson, 2020).

### **Existing tourism governance practice in Nepal**

The success of each democratic movement is promoting good governance in Nepal. There has been an improvement in the rule of law, accountability, transparency, and responsibility towards people. New laws, provisions, policies, and practices have been practiced to ensure good governance in Nepal. Theoretically, Nepal has made several provisions in its constitution and laws for good governance but practically people are not enjoying as much good governance as it has been written in legal documents. Besides this, the promising point is that Nepal is heading towards accelerating the pace and strengthening the quality of good governance for its people (Dahal, 2017, p. 31).

The role of local government is that of driving sustainable development agenda within the destination. Governments should provide an environment that enables and encourages the private sector, local community, tourists and other stakeholders to respond to sustainability issues. This can be best achieved by management, drawn up in concert with others. Local government has responsibility for land use planning, development applications for tourism related land uses, and the provision of local infrastructure and public amenities (Hall, 2000 cited in Chili & Xulu, 2015). Indeed the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities by local governments can have a significant influence on the image and attractiveness of a destination, the depth and diversity of the available product, and ultimately, on how tourists experience a destination (Dredge, 2001 in Chili & Xulu, 2015).

NTB has prepared a hygiene protocol as guidelines to be maintained strictly for resuming the tourism industry. Altogether, 270 travels and tour agencies, restaurants, curio shops and hotels have been closed in the past three months and around hundreds of hotels and around 10,000 tourism subsectors are facing problem to sustain their businesses amid COVID-19 crisis (Ojha, 2020 in Ulak, 2020). Newly developed "COVID-19 strategy and Hygiene Protocols for the Tourism Industry" highlights that we are now exposing ourselves to the biggest crisis we ever had in the history of tourism worldwide with "Social/physical distancing, sanitizing and staying safe at home" considering these all as new norms. It has been expected that this new normal will have very tremendous effects in global sector of outbound tourism which was at the line of 1.4 billion in 2019 and the same was estimated to stand on 2 billion by 2030. We are now struggling against new waves of life and living going through these hard moments. The competence of our response to COVID-19 is essential to our role as stewards of both our environment and our economy. For tourism destinations, a key success factor is the ability to provide a safe, predictable and secure environment for visitors (Volo, 2007; in Speakman & Sharpley, 2012, p.1 cited in Ulak, 2020). Therefore, the tourism industry tends to be highly sensitive to negative environmental factors (Hung, Tseng, & Petrick, 2007 in Ulak, 2020) like COVID-19 pandemic which has capability to persuade the mobility of tourism to immobility drastically.

In Nepal, there is a provision of separate tourism ministry for policy formulation and regulation of its implementation at the federal level to overlook the entire tourism sector of the country. It has got a designated directorate and a semi-autonomous body namely, Nepal Tourism Board. As the country has moved towards its 3 tier government structure, the local level government bodies have been entrusted to formulate, devise and implement the local level tourism promotion policies. In Nepal, a dedicated tourism policy is in place. It has devised the following objectives. The objectives themselves will contribute towards the good governance in Nepalese tourism sector

- ❖ To develop tourism as an important sector of the national economy by developing linkages between tourism and other sectors.
- ❖ To diversify tourism down to rural areas so as to improve employment opportunities, foreign currency earnings, growth of national income and regional imbalances.
- ❖ To improve natural, cultural and human environments of the nation in order to develop and expand the tourism industry.
- ❖ To maintain a good image of the nation in the international community by providing quality service and a sense of security.
- ❖ To develop and promote Nepal as an attractive tourism destination.

To give a strategic direction to the tourism industry, tourism policy, national tourism strategy(2016-25) and numerous other policies and guidelines are in place. Nepal tourism board (NTB) makes coordination between government and private sector initiatives in line with the policies set by the government. To lead a national campaign like VNY and other specific years or to mark the special day with tremendous tourism importance, a special committee is formed and functionalized to devise the relevant activities and to execute them in the spirit of the Tourism strategies and policies. Still, we have a different reality here in Nepal. The tourism industry in Nepal has always worked under the assumption that things will be normal, and that tourists would continue to flock to Nepal, as long as there is growth in international travel (Nepal, 2020).

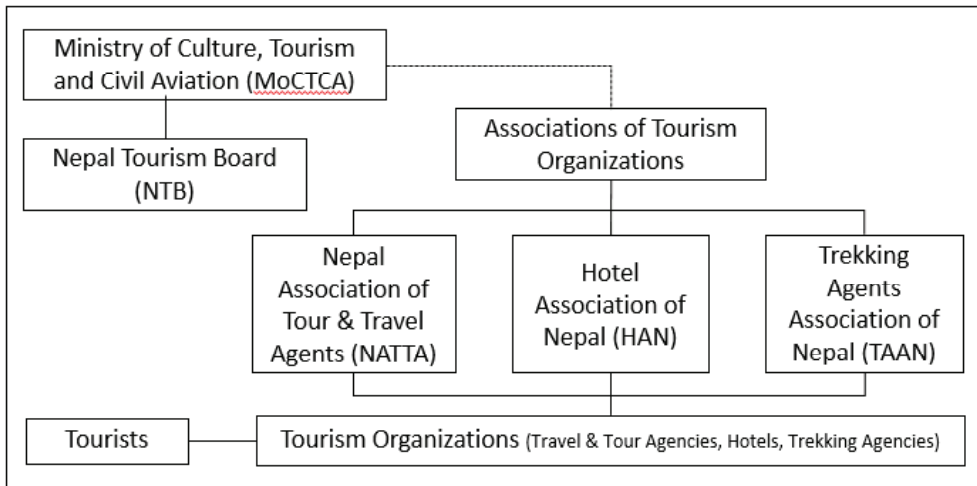
There are over 4,500 tourism organizations registered with the Tourism Department of Nepal. The major stakeholders in the tourism industry are tourism service providers, tourists, and the government. Most of the service providers in Nepal provide either tours and travel, trekking, or accommodation services to the tourists. Those tourism organizations are usually represented by either one or more associations, such as Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA), Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) and Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN). These associations are independent, not-for-profit and representatives of specific tourism industries, for example, HAN representing all hoteliers. Figure 1 shows major stakeholders of the tourism industry in Nepal and an overall structure of how tourism organizations fall under these associations and are running their operations with guidance from those associations. Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA) is the pioneer government department for Nepal tourism and they also have an autonomous entity called Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) which is an independent government body dedicated to advertising Nepal tourism to the world.

Recently Nepal Tourism Board has developed a regulatory document

“Operational Guideline with Health Protocol for Tourism Sector” which has clearly mentioned the various precautionary measures to follow strictly in numerous tourism entities and sectors so as tourists could feel themselves safe and secure from transmission of contagious diseases like COVID-19 itself. The Protocol has detailed out the clear guidelines for the operation of hotels, restaurants, tourism offices, transportation, packaged tours and adventure activities with environment-friendly recommendations for sustainable and responsible tourism practices. It is a recent example of tourism governance in the sense that the regulations have governed the tourism sectors in terms of “Do’s and don’ts”

The protocol guidelines aim to support the industry in gaining back confidence in clients from the domestic international markets and in mitigating the crisis among professionals and industry at large.

**Fig. 1. Nepal tourism governance structure**



Source: Lama, Pradhan & Shrestha (2019)

### **Opportunities and challenges to global tourism following COVID-19**

Many see the COVID-19 pandemic as a turning point for tourism, a chance to reflect on the pressing environmental and socio-economic concerns of the industry, and an opportunity to pinpoint a more desirable direction. However, for tourism to revive as a less impactful and more meaningful industry, more mindful consumers are needed to take factual benefits from the gravity of the current situation. Mindfulness as a practice of bringing a certain quality of attention to moment-by-moment experiences has become an important asset for individuals to cope with the problems of modern life. It is even seen as a significant driver of lifestyle change in Western societies, resulting in an increasing number of more conscious consumers

and mindfulness-driven products and services. The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call and opportunity for the tourism industry to embrace the mindfulness movement, trusting in its capacity to reflect on the current problems and to pave a new way forward towards more compassionate and meaningful tourism for both hosts and guests (Stankov, Filimonau, & Vujičić, 2020).

The disasters and calamities can never be welcome as they lead to irreparable loss of lives and properties. But like every coin to have its two faces, such disasters would bring some opportunities as well which in turn would be a landmark for the development and human civilization. The COVID-19 would certainly implant a high degree of sense of preparedness for any future pandemic. The whole global economy needs to be boosted from every potential corner and that would only be possible by the devotion and dedication of mankind leading to innovation and exploration of new things, sooner or later.

The virus outbreak has upended all businesses, forcing companies, small to big, to adjust the strategy and accelerate digital transformation. Almost all companies will inevitably take a hit, and some may not survive. But the ones that do survive will be more robust and well-prepared than ever for future risks or crisis. Once the market recovers, these companies will need more manpower to resume production, and we will have more opportunities than we had before the outbreak (Huang, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has halted mobility globally on an unprecedented scale, causing the neoliberal market mechanisms of global tourism to be severely disrupted. In turn, this situation is leading to the decline of certain mainstream business formats and, simultaneously, the emergence of others. Based on a review of recent crisis recovery processes, the tourism sector is likely to rebound from this sudden market shock, primarily because of various forms of government interventions. Nevertheless, although policy makers seek to strengthen the resilience of post-pandemic tourism, their subsidies and other initiatives serve to maintain a fundamentally flawed market logic. The crisis has, therefore, brought us to a fork in the road – giving us the perfect opportunity to select a new direction and move forward by adopting a more sustainable path. Specifically, COVID-19 offers public, private, and academic actors a unique opportunity to design and consolidate the transition towards a greener and more balanced tourism. Tourism scholars, for example, can take a leading role in this by redesigning their curriculum to prepare future industry leaders for a more responsible travel and tourism experience (Goodwin, 2020; Nicolas, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020, p.1).

Since its emergence in early 2020, the rapidly-spreading COVID-19 (also referred to as Corona) pandemic has wreaked global havoc. While numerous communities have been facing lockdowns of varying lengths the economic consequences of the

virus have been devastating. The effects on the global tourism sector, not to mention thousands of destinations world wide, have been particularly harmful as our normally hyper-mobile society has ground to a halt. It is not only the major players in the tourism supply chain (e.g., airlines, cruise companies, transnational hotel chains) who have suffered unfathomable damage, which is estimated to amount to €400bn (Goodwin, 2020; Nicolas, 2020 in Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020, p.2).

Harnessing innovation and digital advances provides tourism with opportunities to improve inclusiveness, local community empowerment, and efficient resource management, amongst other objectives within the wider sustainable development agenda.

As the pandemic has been claiming the lives of the people tremendously, it has challenged human innovation and intellect to find a vaccine to combat this pandemic. And simply, it has compelled mankind to be engaged in the invention of the vaccine. To check the deadly spreading of the coronavirus, most of the countries of the world strictly imposed a nationwide lockdown for a long and thus it brought the economic transactions and activities very down resulting in negative economic growth. We have, immediately after lockdown gets lifted, to concentrate our efforts to regain the economic status that was lost due to lockdown which will give us the option to accept challenges.

The pandemic has revealed our strengths and gaps in crystal clear gauging ourselves in the scale of reality. Now we have to acknowledge our shortcomings and weaknesses and be well prepared to fight against any future pandemic, keeping our economic activities intact and less challenging for us. Moreover, it would be yet another opportunity for us to make effective plans on what could be done to help the tourism industry inject and contribute significantly to the economy even at the difficult time scenario (UNWTO, 2020). In a nutshell, during the lockdown followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we can keep ourselves engaged in the following activities because we may not have sufficient time later once the situation gets back to normal and we have to go with our regular work trend and fashion.

- ❖ Revising, revisiting and diversification of tourism governance strategies
- ❖ During the lockdown period, attention can be focused towards cleanliness and disinfection in and around hotels, restaurants, parks and other facilities
- ❖ Cleanliness Disinfections of hotel and accommodation facilities
- ❖ Further research on prospects and potentialities.

### **Limitation of the study**

While engaged for the study on tourism governance, enormous efforts have been made in the global perspective. But the hidden motive of the study is to explore the relevant study and concerns in the Nepalese tourism sector, which are not found as



needed and expected. By this, it seems difficult to have a comparative study on tourism governance in Nepalese specific context, to draw a conclusive idea based on different time frames appears a bit challenging. Moreover, governance in a general sense seems to be exercised but there is lacking dedicated study, analysis, argumentation, and practical research focused on tourism governance.

### **Conclusion**

Post-COVID context would come very challenging for the world economy and especially for the tourism sector. Tourism being the sector of movement and mobility, the pandemic has left the tourism industry nearly paralyzed. The nations once with an epicenter of the pandemic, have tried their revival returning to a normal state but still, it needs time for these all. Governments are planning to provide the relief packages to the hardest-hit sectors but seem challenging as not a single sector remains untouched and bothered. The tourism sector being the highest contributor to almost all the economies, in one or another way or form, the relief and resilience packages are to be designed and offered by the governments.

The private sector in coordination with the government should be engaged in redesigning the tourism package, especially to promote domestic tourism, to extend the messages for the external tourists that their countries are now safer to visit. The values, norms, and standards of governance should be developed in such a way that the tourists could feel it spontaneously. The destination packages should be revisited with added health and safety components to check and control the potential spreading of contagious diseases in the future. We can thus make an argument that tourism can potentially facilitate the attainment of SDGs if it adheres to guiding principles of justice, transparency, accountability, social capital, participation, inclusiveness, and fair power relations. For its assurance, all we need to do is to make relevant and convincing advocacy for the stringent tourism governance in both public and private forums, where applicable and when possible.

Local governments should play a crucial role to drive the agenda of sustainable development within the famous destination. It's government's role to encourage the private sector, local communities, tourists and other stakeholders to address the issues of sustainability. There should be proper nexus of communication, coordination and collaboration (3Cs) between and among the tourists, tourism entrepreneurs and policy makers so as the needs and necessity of each others could be discussed and executed easily without any chances of misunderstanding among themselves. This culture and practice will eventually yield the good governance in tourism sector.



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**THE GAZE**  
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## Constraints to Community Participation in Tourism In Kenya: The Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary

**Paul M. Musila**

Department of Tourism, Kwale County Government, Kenya

*paulmusila@yahoo.com*

**Bonface O. Kihima**

Department of Hospitality and Leisure Studies, The Technical University of Kenya

*odiarab@yahoo.fr*

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### Abstract

*Community Based Tourism (CBT) is among several types of tourism that have been considered sustainable and beneficial to the host populations in conservation areas. The local community participation in tourism in conservation areas is supposed to be high and its members should benefit from the tourism process. However, having been presented with opportunity to improve their livelihoods, communities are constrained in various ways and generally fail to benefit from tourism development. This study was set to investigate constraints to community participation in conservation areas. It was carried out in Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary (MES) in Kwale County, Kenya, using a descriptive survey design. Data was collected using researcher administered questionnaires and oral interviews. The results indicated that lack of coordination among stakeholders; inadequate financial resources, lack of conducive environment for tourism growth, and lack of skills/knowledge were major constraints to participation. The study concludes that to address both operational and structural constraints to community participation, the national and county governments should develop policies that compel investors to honour agreements*

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### Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
*kunwar.dr@gmail.com*

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*with communities, assist communities to enter into fair collaborations with investors, and provide incentives to investors in tourism.*

## **Introduction**

Community-Based Tourism Initiatives (CBTIs) in Kenya came into being to secure wildlife habitats and diversify tourism. However, policy documents – for instance, the Tourism Act 2011 that provides for the development, management, marketing and regulation of sustainable tourism and tourism-related activities and services (GoK, 2011) – do not have provisions for CBTIs development. Similarly, in the Vision 2030 blueprint for Kenya, tourism is one of the components of the economic pillar (NESC, 2007) but CBTIs are not among the flagship projects. This leaves CBTIs in Kenya to develop by default with no guiding framework that could direct this critical sector. The success of CBTIs cannot therefore be guaranteed in the absence of a well-thought framework.

Although Kibicho (2008: 214) argued that community-based tourism is gaining momentum in Kenya and in the world at large, he noted that “the extent to which this theoretical idealism is met by reality in Kenya is still debatable”. Manyara and Jones (2007) have criticized this type of tourism on the consideration that it only enhances the conservation agenda and has little significant impact on poverty and on communities. In addition, Barrow and Fabricius (2002) noted that conservation linked to development is unsustainable while Worah (2002: 82) observed that “there was a weak relationship between enterprise success and conservation success”. All these critical views point to the idea that, the real effects of conservation and tourism on a country’s development are not as obvious as some may say. Consequently, they need to be critically studied and documented. In view of this, Kihima (2015) recently reflected upon the objectives of CBTIs, noting that they should revolve around informed, deliberate and collaborative management actions of: ‘thinking of the tourist, appealing to the tourist, proper execution of projects and collaboration with other stakeholders’.

To go one step further and understand the ways in which the host community could and should participate in tourism, this paper presents a study aimed to assess the extent to which social, political and economic constraints shape – and hinder – community participation in tourism projects, and which one exactly. The study was conducted in Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, located in Kwale county at the South coast of Kenya.

The Republic of Kenya is an East African country located between 4°40’ north and 4°20’ south; and between 34°0’ west and 42°0’ east. It covers a surface area of 582,648 Km<sup>2</sup> and is situated astride the equator. The country is well-known for nature-based tourism, popularly known as safaris (World Resource Institute, et al., 2007) and is

well endowed with the national park and reserve system occupying 44,562 Km<sup>2</sup> or 8% of its territory. About 70% of visitors come to Kenya to enjoy the country's natural beauty and engage in nature-based tourism activities (World Resource Institute, et al., 2007). In 2019, Kenya received 2.0 million international arrivals each staying an average of 12.1 days with 63.3% of the total arrivals coming for holiday (GoK, 2020). With a beach front of 530 Km stretching from Somalia to the Tanzanian border, the coastal beach accounted for 38% of the total bed nights in the country in the year 2019, while National parks and Reserves had a total of 2.98 million visitor entries in the same year (GoK, 2020). Among the first CBTIs to be established in Kenya and recognized for its best practice is the Mwalunganje Elephant Sanctuary (Manyara and Jones, 2007), therefore being considered a 'successful' initiative. Nevertheless, the sanctuary receives less than 3,000 visitors in a year.

The community members around this Sanctuary have been participating in CBT for a period of more than 20 years. Thus, they have had sufficient time to notice the effects of tourism development and also recall how life was before the onset of tourism in this area. The first part of this paper analyses the existing literature on constraints facing community participation in conservation areas. After presenting the Mwalunganje Elephant Sanctuary and describing the methodology used in the study, the second part provides its most salient results while the third and last part offers a discussion on the presented results by drawing upon qualitative information collected that may explain why there is, in Mwalunganje Elephant Sanctuary, lack of coordination among stakeholders, inadequate financial resources, lack of conducive environment for tourism growth, and lack of skills/knowledge at various levels. It suggests that the national and county governments should develop policies that compel investors to honour agreements with communities, assist communities to enter into fair collaborations with investors, and provide incentives to investors in tourism

### **Constraints to community participation**

Community participation is a fundamental factor in ensuring that local communities are guaranteed benefits from tourism development in conservation areas, and their way of thinking and doing are respected and not negatively impacted. Participation means that community members are part of decision making on the use of their cultural spaces. However, local communities are constrained in various ways while participating in tourism related activities (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019; Juma & Khademi-Vidra, 2019, Devkant & Bagri, 2018, Mensah, 2017; Chili and Ngxongo, 2017). Tosun (2000) identified limitations to public participation in decision-making process and benefit sharing of tourism development in developing countries. He classified these limitations in three categories namely: operational, structural, and cultural.



Limitations at the operational level include the centralisation of public management of tourism development by national governments. All decisions regarding planning, implementation and monitoring of tourism development are made at a national level with minimal or no input from the local community. Consequently, only a few areas, where decision makers at the national level have interest in, experience tourism development while the other regions are neglected. For instance, Akama, Maingi and Camarco (2011) and Kihima (2015) observed that despite enormous and varied potential for wildlife tourism development in Kenya, the country's tourism is geographically limited to a few protected areas and conservancies. Oketch (2009) attributed this to the absence of appropriate land-use policy and procedures governing the location and distribution of tourism amenities and infrastructure in various parks, reserves, and conservancies. Additionally, even in areas considered developed with regard to tourism, community participation is often hindered by existing land ownership regimes. Nevertheless, there is need to broaden geographical spread of tourism and deepen the product base through CBTIs.

Moreover, lack of co-ordination amongst stakeholders (government agencies, hoteliers, tour operators, local community, and NGOs) involved in tourism development limits community participation (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019). Each stakeholder is driven by the desire to achieve his/her objectives with little regard to the objectives of others. Kibicho (2008) noted that funding institutions were more concerned with project effectiveness/success than the fundamental and less concrete aspects of community-based tourism like stakeholders' collaboration, while the government agency emphasised conservation. He further observed a level of distrust between the local host community in Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary and the Kenya Wildlife Service, the national conservation organisation, and noted that where trust is weak participants do not achieve the desired outputs. Besides, insufficient tourism development data and poor distribution of information (Scheyvens, 2002) makes the community more vulnerable to manipulation. Under such circumstances, low public participation in the tourism development process is apparent as the community is not sufficiently informed.

Structural limitations at CBTI level include lack of appropriate legal system, especially on matters regarding land ownership (Manyara and Jones, 2007) where initiatives are registered as Community Based Organisations (CBOs), associations, trusts or limited companies with various land ownership tenures and without a definite land use policy. This makes it easy to convert land from conservation and tourism development to agriculture as happened in Kimana, Kenya. Lack of trained human resources and expertise amongst the local community limits participation in tourism. Muganda, Mgonja and Backman (2013) observed that the community in Mto wa Mbu in Tanzania did not wish elected officials or the local committee to



independently make decisions on matters tourism development because they lacked tourism skills and some of them had little education. Similar observations were made by Manyara and Jones (2007) in six CBTIs in Kenya.

High cost implication associated with community participation and inadequate financial resources (Tosun, 2000; Scheyvens, 2002; Manyara and Jones, 2007; Chili and Ngxongo, 2017) are other structural limitations hindering community participation in tourism. Communities frequently lack resources and power (Scheyvens, 2002; Akama, Maingi and Camarco, 2011), and are therefore unable to establish amenities and infrastructure required for tourism development. This makes it difficult for the community to improve on the quality of the tourism product in their locality and to access the desired markets. The local community therefore becomes reliant on other stakeholders, hence constraining its participation.

Cultural limitations include limited capacity of action by poor populations, lack of inspiration and low level of awareness in the local community (Kibicho, 2008). Manyara and Jones (2007: 410) in their study on best practice model for community capacity building in community-based enterprises in Kenya noted that “some respondents felt that majority of the local communities were not aware at all about tourism and that in such cases it was only the local elites who were”. This shows that lack of awareness and information hinders most community members from participating in tourism. Lack of inspiration and low levels of awareness in local communities has been attributed to a history of ignoring the grassroots in decision-making (Tosun, 2006; Mensah, 2017).

According to Blackstock (2005) and Kibicho (2008), the heterogeneous nature of communities is a constraint to their participation in tourism development. A community comprises of several kinds of people, often with uneven status and positions and different ambitions. Such segmentations lead to unequal opportunities for participation in tourism activities and struggles within the community.

All these deficiencies form severe predicaments to community participation in tourism and slow down the destination development process. The general outcome of such barriers is often the communities' limited eagerness towards the industry, which results in little benefits trickling down to the local community. Past researches, as enumerated above, have focused on identifying such constraints at various sites. However, little has been done to establish the extent to which such constraints hinder the involvement of the local community in CBTIs, and consequently their sustainability. Findings of such a research would be useful in identifying the priority areas and mechanisms for minimising the negative effects of these barriers to the host community.

## Research methodology

Currently, Kenya has approximately 250 CBTIs, a majority of which are located in five focal areas: Taita-Taveta, Laikipia, Samburu, Amboseli, Kwale and Maasai Mara. They are all considered as having high potential for tourism development and conservation (FECTO, 2010). These initiatives are conservation-based and bring together members from the host community, private investors, different government conservation agencies and donor NGOs from time to time. However, there are no structures both at the national and county level to oversee the coordination of the activities of these different stakeholders and monitor their adequate development. Several tourism and conservation organisation – for instance, the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA), Ecotourism Kenya (EK), Federation of Community Tourism Organisations (FECTO), and Kenya Community Based Tourism (KECOBAT) network – were formed to help CBTIs realise their tourism potential in Kenya. Yet their activities and scope of action are limited due to lack of funds. Further, being membership groups, membership and annual fees are hindering some CBTIs from joining these associations, thus leaving many on their own.

The Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary (fig.1), in Kwale, was registered as a limited company in 1994 under the name; Golini-Mwaluganje Community Conservation ltd and adopted the name Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary (MES) as the trade name. In the company's Memorandum of Association, members were required to give legal right of vacant possession of their parcel of land to the company, and that they would not dispose off the parcel of land without express and written consent of the company (MES, 1994). An acre or part thereof constitutes a single share. Due to difficulties in securing funding as many organisations were unwilling to fund limited companies, MES initiated a process of registering as a Community Based Organisation (CBO) in 2013.

The study targeted 282 landowners who ceded their land to establish MES, 5 directors and 19 staff of MES. Descriptive research design was utilized to measure, classify, analyse and interpret data (Kombo and Tromp, 2009) by describing possible behaviour, attitudes, values and characteristics (Orodho, 2003). This design provides answers to the questions of who, what, when, where, and how, associated with a specific research problem (Kothari, 2004). Since the research intended to investigate constraints to community participation based on past and present experience of the land owners this design was considered ideal.

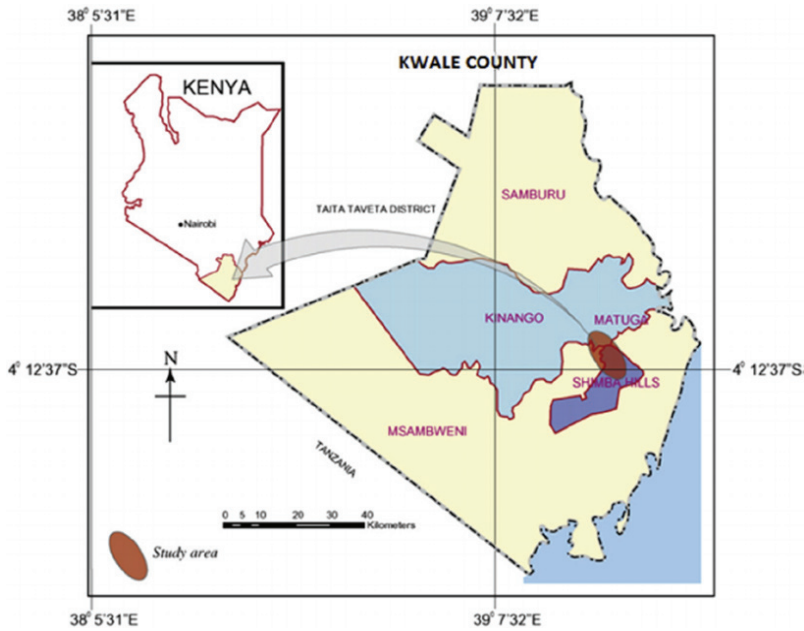
Data was collected through researcher administered questionnaires and interviews on the constraints to community participation. The questionnaire had both structured and unstructured questions, while the interview schedule had unstructured questions. The use of both categories of questions in the questionnaire

allowed for collection of in-depth information (Kombo & Tromp, 2009). Researcher administered questionnaires were used for the landowners because many of them could not read and write, while interviews were used for the key informants' i.e. staff (19) and ex- officio (5). To achieve the desired sample, stratified random sampling was used for landowners. The objective of stratified random sampling was to get the desired representation from different subgroups in the population.

MES is divided into two settlement sections; Golini adjudication section and Mwaluganje A/B adjudication section (MES, 2012), which formed the subgroups of the study among the community. In each sub-group, every community member was given a number after which the numbers were placed in a container and randomly picked. Members corresponding to the numbers picked were included in the sample. Picking numbers continued until the required sample size was achieved. Thus, no bias was noted during the sampling. This gave each member a chance to be involved in the study.

Contacts of ex-officio directors and staff were obtained from the MES office. The directors and staff were chosen because of their past and present involvement in tourism development in the community, hence deemed to have in-depth information about MES and CBTI development. A census for this category was used since the entire population is small and easily accessible (Kombo and Tromp, 2009).

The study was conducted between September 2013 and May 2016. Two research assistants and two translators (from English to the native Digo and Duruma dialects) were recruited to assist in administering the questionnaires by moving from one household to another. Data was collected in the morning and late in the afternoon. It was suspended at mid-day to allow the respondents go to mosques for midday prayers (majority were Muslims). Interviews were conducted by the researcher through visiting individual directors in their residences, offices and businesses. Staffs were interviewed at their respective work stations. The respondents were notified before commencement of the interview through a phone call.

**Figure 1: A Map of Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary**

## Findings

### Respondent characteristics

A total of 130 respondents (50 Golini and 80 Mwaluganje) participated in the study. Out of the total number of respondents 69.2% were male while 30.8% were female. The majority of the respondents 84.6% were aged 51 and above. Moreover, 54.6% of the respondents had no formal education, while 27.7% had primary level of education; 17.7% had secondary education level and mid-level college education. The results depict a community that is not formally well educated and likely to face challenges in making informed decisions on matters relating to tourism development.

Moreover, the findings indicated that 52.3% of the landowners practiced mixed farming (subsistence farming and keeping of livestock) as their means of livelihood and 32.3% practiced crop farming with the main crop being maize inter-planted with bananas, cassava and cowpeas. Only 9% depended solely on employment, 4.6% do business (but not with MES) and a mere 1.5% practiced livestock rearing only. Respondents mentioned that during the dry season (January–April) their livestock illegally graze in MES, reducing the attractiveness of the site. While during the rainy season their farms experience increased Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC), sometimes leading to loss of both wildlife and humans.

**Constraints to community participation**

Constraints to participation were investigated using various statements (table 1). Response to the statements were classified based on a Likert scale of 1=strongly agree, 2=agree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree. Mean (M) values and Standard deviation (SD) were calculated for the various statements. Mean (M) values closer to 1 represented high level of agreement to the statement under consideration.

**Table 1: Mean (M) values and Standard deviation (SD) of the various statements on constraints to community participation in Tourism development**

Constraints to community participation in tourism development	Number of respondents	Mean (M)		Std. Deviation (SD)
		Stat	Std. Error	Stat
1. Lack of financial resources for tourism development.	130	1.64	.042	.482
2. Lack of skills/knowledge to manage tourism development in MES.	130	1.77	.037	.423
3. Lack of adequate consultations on decisions regarding the development of MES.	130	4.48	.044	.502
4. Lack of benefits to the community.	130	4.35	.050	.567
5. Inadequate role played by the private sector	130	1.62	.043	.486
6. Lack of conducive environment for tourism growth	130	1.64	.050	.571

**Lack of financial resources for tourism development**

Respondents were asked if the community lacked financial resources for tourism development in the Sanctuary. In response, 36.2% strongly agreed while 63.8% agreed, M=1.64 (second closest mean to 1), SD=0.482, (table 1) indicating that the community lacked financial resources for tourism development. Respondents mentioned that they lacked funds to procure brochures for marketing, participate in trade fairs, acquire a van to ferry clients to the Sanctuary, repair roads and construct a tented camp, among other things.

### **Lack of skills and knowledge to manage tourism**

Variable 'community lacked skills and knowledge to manage tourism development' had  $M = 1.77$  (third closest mean to 1),  $SD = 0.423$ . The community lacked skills and knowledge (23.1% strongly agreed and 76.9% agreed) to fully participate in tourism development.

### **Inadequate role played by other actors**

Of the respondents, 37.7% strongly agreed with the statement that the developer in MES did not adequately play her role as per the agreement while 62.3% agreed to the statement, corresponding to  $M = 1.62$  (Mean closest to 1),  $SD = 0.486$ . Similarly, a majority of respondents, 98.4% (strongly agreed and agreed)  $M = 1.64$  (Mean second closest to 1),  $SD = 0.571$  indicated that the conservation agency (KWS) had not created a conducive environment to enable the community fully participate in their projects in MES.

The respondents mentioned that at inception, the investor (Dhanjal Investment ltd) promised to construct and manage a tented camp, market the sanctuary and maintain roads in return for a site in the Sanctuary to construct a '*lunch banda*' (an extension of the tented camp). This worked well for 5 years after which the investor neglected the camp, stopped marketing the Sanctuary and stopped maintaining the roads. According to the respondents this denied the community opportunities (employment and business) to participate in tourism development. On a similar note, respondents complained that the conservation agency failed to involve them in branding and security enhancement activities which took place in the Sanctuary despite promises to do so.

The respondents indicated that the community had not received the desired support from the Kenya Wildlife Service. This included reintroduction of animals and road maintenance, though the agency had taken up fence maintenance and enhanced security. One respondent was quoted saying: "We requested them to restock the sanctuary with more animals but now it is the third year and nothing has been done yet. We also requested them to help repair the roads, nothing has been done, yet roads are impassable".

The directors also identified land ownership system as a constraint to participation. It was explained that though under MES, the land was legally owned by individual members, this made it difficult to carry out projects or investments on the land. This was illustrated by the following statement from one respondent: "When we identified a site for the construction of a tented camp by an investor; the individual landowner insisted that he wanted to deal directly with the investor since the title was in his name. It was after lengthy discussions and persuasion that he agreed to 'lease' the land to MES who would then leased it to the investor". When MES wants to carry out a major investment in the Sanctuary, it either has to buy or lease land from the owner,

which according to the respondents is a tedious process and discourages prospective partners and therefore limiting participation.

### **Lack of adequate consultations on decisions regarding development of MES**

Respondents were asked if they were not adequately consulted on decisions regarding development of MES. In response, 51.5% of respondents disagreed while 48.5% strongly disagreed with the statement that they were not adequately consulted  $M = 4.48$  (mean furthest from 1),  $SD = 0.502$  on decision regarding the development of MES.

### **Lack of benefits to the community**

Finally, respondents were asked if benefits from MES trickled down to the community. To elicit more details from the respondents, the statement was negatively presented. Of the respondents 60.8% disagreed whereas 37.7% strongly disagreed to the statement that benefits from MES did not trickle down to the landowners ( $M=4.35$ ,  $SD= 0.567$ ). Respondents commented that the mechanism of sharing financial benefits (compensation) based on size of land owned was very good and objective, however complained that the amount of 5 USD per acre per year were too little. Interview results revealed that annual compensation was the only benefit enjoyed by all landowners' individually. Other benefits like employment and business linkages benefitted very few people. Initially compensation was dependent on income raised from tourism which varied depending on the number of visitors and size of land (in acres) owned. However, when tourism was too low the management had to seek for well-wishers to donate money towards the compensation kitty to just keep the landowners contented.

### **Extent of the constraints**

To establish the extent to which these constraints hindered community participation in tourism development, data was subjected to a Chi-square test with 'involvement' as the row values and 'constraints' as the column values. In table 2,  $X^2$  represent the Chi value,  $V$  (Cramer's  $V$ ) is a measure of association between the "row variable" and "column variable"; values close to 1 indicate strong positive associations,  $P$  represents the significance levels ( $P$  value less than 0.05 indicate significant associations).

The findings (table 2), showed that lack of financial resources to manage the sanctuary ( $V=0.568$ ,  $P=0.042$ ), private investor had not adequately played her role ( $V=0.822$ ,  $P=0.020$ ), benefits from MES did not trickle down to the local landowners ( $V=0.483$ ,  $P=0.006$ ), community lacked skills/knowledge to manage tourism development in MES ( $V=0.411$ ,  $P=0.017$ ) and the conservation agency (KWS) had not created a conducive environment ( $V=0.365$ ,  $P=0.012$ ) hindered community participation significantly from a moderate to a high extent. The other



constraint; landowners were not adequately consulted ( $V=0.067$ ,  $P=0.418$ ) did not significantly hinder participation of local community. Therefore, the constraints hindered community participation from a moderate to high extent ( $0.365=V=0.822$ ;  $0.017=P=0.042$ ).

**Table 2: Chi- Square test results on the extent to which constraints hinder community participation.**

Variable	X <sup>2</sup>	df	V	P
1. The community lacks financial capability to manage the sanctuary	3.562	1	.568	.042
2. The community lacks training to manage tourism development in MES	18.887	2	.411	.017
3. Landowners are not adequately consulted on any decision regarding the development of MES	.576	1	.067	.418
4. Benefits from MES do not trickle down to the local landowners	10.398	2	.483	.006
5. The private investor Dhanjal Investment has not adequately played her role	20.051	2	.822	.020
6. KWS has not created a conducive environment	2.016	2	.365	.012

## Discussions and conclusion

### High expectations but failed promises of development

The results from this study show that operational, structural and cultural limitations to sustainable and participatory tourism exist in Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, but with varied representation. Lack of coordination was identified as a major constraint at the operational level. This was depicted by two variables: first, the private investor, Dhanjal Investment Ltd, did not adequately play its role i.e. development and management of a catering and accommodation facility, sanctuary marketing and road maintenance. The investor contracted to manage tourism sites in the sanctuary failed to honour agreements with the community. Efforts by the community in conjunction with KWS to convince the investor to honour the agreement were unsuccessful. The investor promised to improve the camp, carry out marketing and repair roads but failed to do so. Because of this, the community felt short changed and denied an opportunity to fully participate in tourism development. Further, the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), who issued the investor with a 25 years lease, felt that Dhanjal Investment Ltd had not violated any of the conditions in the lease. This depicted a lack of objective coordination/collaboration among the stakeholders (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019).

Secondly KWS did not create conducive environment to enable the community full participation in tourism development. The agency failed to fulfil promises made at inception (construction of an office), to fully involve community in their projects (construction of a new gate, security enhancement), and to timely and positively respond to community requests for improvement (road repair and reintroduction of animals) of the Sanctuary as a tourist site. According to MES community, the agency allocated very little funds for community projects in MES due to the high demand of such funds from other projects in the ecosystem. Further, obtaining funds from the agency through proposals, though an option, was not guaranteed and took too long to get responses. Although the issues raised by the community were genuine, the community seemed to have expected too much from the agency, without considering its capacity and the bureaucratic nature of decision making in government agencies. However, such views by the community were to be expected, considering that it was the conservation agency that initiated the process of sanctuary formation.

These findings portray a community unable to fully participate in tourism development due to activities of other stakeholders who influence the success and viability of tourism. The absence of a single entity with a mandate to co-ordinate and influence activities of the stakeholders worsens the situation for the community. According to Kibicho (2003), the integration of various interested parties (with equally varied interest) into the tourism industry while at the same time guarding the importance of developing a 'workable tourism management strategy' remains a real challenge to many tourism destinations. Other studies (Mitchell and Muckosy, 2008; Dieke, 2001, Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019), also found that lack of connexion between various stakeholders in CBT development constrains the participation of the local community. This was attributed to the current policy which gives various mandates to government agencies on tourism development and conservation with none to ensure that these agencies and stakeholders fulfil their obligations to the local community.

In MES, lack of funds was attributed to poor performance of tourism (Kihima, 2015), and lack of external support. Honey (2008) noted that even though MES had one of the highest concentrations of elephants in the country in 2002, its visibility to the beach resorts only twenty miles away was poor hence resort guests were not sent to the sanctuary. This state of affairs therefore contributed to low visitor numbers as well as low revenue for the sanctuary. Withdrawal of major support by Eden Wildlife Trust (EWT) (an NGO) exacerbated the financial woes of the Sanctuary. This was well illustrated by the following comment from one of the directors: "Financial challenges increased when Eden Wildlife Trust stopped paying the manager, fuelling our vehicle and funding major projects in MES". Lack of financial resources has been identified by various researchers (Tosun, 2006; Zhao and Richie, 2007; Manyara

and Jones, 2007, Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019) as a major challenge facing CBTIs and noted that this shortcoming appeared to be a key drawback to implementation of participatory tourism development in developing countries. Lack of funds due to poor performance of tourism, limited support from donors and government agencies, if not well addressed, could lead to deterioration of tourism.

Lack of skills and knowledge were identified to be a major constraint in the MES community. This was attributed to low levels of education identified in the respondents' characteristics and failure by the investor and conservation agency to provide more information to the community. Reduction of support by EWT was due to protests by a section of the community to compel the donor to dismiss a manager employed at inception (who was not a local) and engage a local one. This depicted a feeling of lack of ownership (Mensah, 2017) of the project on the part of the community. Though the donor felt that the proposed manager lacked capacity to manage the Sanctuary, he obliged owing to the community's persistence. The community welcomed the decision, as they thought that they could manage the project without donor support, an illustration of lack of awareness and information by community on matters of tourism development and conservation, which led to failure by the community to achieve the desired objectives in MES. To avert such situations, there is need for more awareness creation, capacity building and policies that guide local community members on how to engage more with the policy makers and other tourism stakeholders. Moreover, Juma and Khademi-Vidra (2019) note that only professional management can guarantee CBTIs success and that they should be managed as a business in structure and form.

The findings concur with Muganda, Mgonja, and Backman (2013) and Cole (2006) who observed that due to low levels of education, community lacked knowledge, skills and interest to participate in tourism development taking place in their locality. Similarly, Meguro and Inoue (2011) noted that in Kimana, the local people left marketing of the sanctuary to KWS, and the former manager from the community found that to be in order. This is an indication of an expertise gap in matters relating to tourism in the management. Thus, considering the lack of understanding of tourist activity by the local populations, one realizes that knowledge necessary to participate in a tourism project is more complex than the act of assembling the project itself and attracting tourists. It is necessary to train the local community on the basic concept of tourism. Generally, the fixation and refusal to change makes CBTIs unappealing to the tourism industry. This implies that such projects lack the necessary magnetic power and appeal, hence the call for right skills and knowledge on the part of the local community. Though attributed to low levels of education in majority of the rural areas, failure to involve the youth who tend to be more schooled also makes the future bleak for CBTIs.

Lack of appropriate legal system on land ownership for conservation and tourism development, made it cumbersome for the management to enter into partnership with new investors for and on behalf of the community, limiting the uptake of new partners. It also made it easy for individual members to sell their land without contacting the management, exposing the whole project to individuals (buyers) who may not be interested in maintaining current form of land use.

Finally, a single social constraint of low level of awareness was identified in MES. As much as the community wanted to be independent, its members did not acknowledge that they lacked capacity to manage the project without any external support. Their motivation for independence was inspired by the revenue generated, with no consideration for revenue sources, costs incurred and long-term sustainability. Tosun (2006) attributed low level of awareness concerning potential of tourism development, costs and benefits of tourism to the style of tourism development in developing countries. There is a need therefore amongst CBTIs for more community awareness about tourism benefits, costs, structure of the industry and how it is affected by external factors. This calls for community members to organise themselves for the purpose of sharing information and possible experiences (Thetsane, 2019).

Inadequate consultation was found not to be a barrier to community participation in MES. This was attributed to the membership scheme adopted that restricted membership to landowners only and management structure where directors were elected democratically by the community and retired by rotation after a short period of 2 years. These findings contradict those by Dogra & Gupta (2012) and Tosun (2000) who found inadequate consultation of the local community by other stakeholders in tourism development to be a major challenge in developing countries. Similarly, lack of benefits was not a constraint to community participation in MES. The results indicated that the local community was satisfied with the mechanism of sharing benefits from the Sanctuary, particularly the financial benefits. Respondents commented that the mechanism of sharing financial benefits (compensation) based on size of land owned was very good, however expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of money they earned per acre per year.

These findings reveal that the main focus in CBTIs should be on the cooperation and coordination among the stakeholders who should fulfil their obligations to the community. This will ensure that more local people get involved in tourism development. However, it should be noted that these constraints could be an extension of predominant social, political and economic models, which have hindered local communities from realizing higher levels of development in Kenya. In this regard, minimizing these barriers to community participation in tourism development will depend on the cooperation of national government, county government, the private sector, NGOs and the community.

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**THE GAZE**  
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# Conveying Impetus for Fostering Tourism and Hospitality Entrepreneurship in Touristic Destination: Lessons Learnt from Pokhara, Nepal

**Niranjan Devkota**

Quest International College, Pokhara University, Nepal  
*niranjan@quest.edu.np*

**Udaya Raj Paudel**

Quest International College, Pokhara University, Nepal  
*udaya@quest.edu.np*

**Udbodh Bhandari**

Quest International College, Pokhara University, Nepal  
*udbodh@quest.edu.np*

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## Abstract

*This research explores the inter connectedness in entrepreneurs' and tourists' perception about western influence in business culture of touristic city – Pokhara, Nepal and provides suggestions for fostering sustainable tourism development of the destination. Primary data results are drawn in which researchers have collected 249 data from tourists' viewpoint, 395 from determining provincial government roles and 395 from hospitality entrepreneurship along with key informants interview with experts' viewpoints for generating practical solutions of the existing problems in order to enhance hospitality and tourism business for progress and sustainability. Based on this triangular data results and secondary resources' analysis, this research concludes that, for the sustainable tourism business in Pokhara, the entrepreneurs in the area should recognize, preserve, promote and sustain local socio-cultural practices; tourists' viewpoints should be addressed and Gandaki provincial government roles must be constructive.*

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## Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
*kunwar.dr@gmail.com*

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## Introduction

The progression of the contemporary service industries (Clancy, 2001; Jonsson Kvist & Klefsjö, 2006) – after World War II (Middleton & Lickorish, 2007) travel and tourism started gearing up and some specific touristic destinations have served as a backbone for the developing countries (Smeral, 1988; Akis, 2011; Chou, 2013). And the growth has noticeably increased all types of entrepreneurship, jobs, infrastructure, modernization, westernization, globalization and living standards of the local (Endy, 1998; Yudina et al., 2016; Furr, 2004; Thong, 2012; Irandu, 2014; Durydiwka, 2014). In addition, westernization and globalization effects in Pokhara are more apparent than (Zurick, 1992; Stevens, 1993; Nepal & Karst, 2017; Nyaupane et al., 2006; Nepal, 2007; McLean, 1999) observe the multicultural celebration, like X-Mass, English New Year, Valentine Day and other street carnivals on rise marking the western influence in Nepalese touristic destinations.

In the touristic destinations, tourists' preferences are multiple based on their personal interest (Irandu, 2004; Su et al., 2005). Pearce et al. (2015) suggest that tourists are named as relaxers, sensation-seekers, and existential-type. Moreover, for making a congenial environment for tourists and for overall development of tourist destinations (Stevens, 1988; Choi & Murray, 2010) mention that building a better tourist destination is possible with local government's initiation by including stakeholders and locals while planning for development of that destination. Tourism has become way to reflect cultural significance and communicate with rest of the world (Richards, 2018; Bellow et al., 2017). Various tourism destinations have proved themselves and are able to attract thousands of visitors every year which can be analyzed and witnessed as the result of proper strategies and planning made by the government of respective nations and places. Some of those destinations include: that Los Vegas in USA, Goa and Sikkim in India, Bali in Indonesia, Santosha in Singapore, Capetown in South Africa, Beijing in China, Paris in France, Rome in Italy and Pokhara in Nepal (Koh, 1996; Cooper and Hall, 2008; Solvoll et al., 2015; Petrevska & Collins-Kreiner, 2016).

It is not common that hundreds of thousands tourists prefer to visit Nepal (Endy, 1998; Chan, 2006). The Hotel Royal, foundation of modern hotel industry in Nepal, was initiated by Russian hotelier Boris Nikolayevich Lissanevitch in 1951 which now have thousands of hotels with quality and facilitative rooms (Sharma, 2017). Nepal is said to have comparative advantage in tourism sector having positive aspects on adventure tourism, favorable natural environment and rich culture (Sharma, 2012). Nepal is a land-lock country having surrounded by India on three sides and China on one side (Paudel and Devkota, 2018) with naturally alluring beauty of Himalays and adventure tourism (Nepal, 1997; Gautam, 2011; KC et al., 2015). In Nepal, tourism is not only limited to plain or hilly lands but tourism business can even be seen and performed at mountain region as well, including Namchebazar – gateway of Mount

Everest (Nepal, 2000; Frohlick, 2003), Tilicho lake, Poon Hill, Kailashman Sarovar, Kalinchowk and Langtang valley as well (Nepal, 2007). As per Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (2019), Nepal welcomes tourists of various nature every year besides expeditions and the number of tourists who come for Whereas, NPC (2014) shows that the average investment required in promoting tourism sector in Nepal is NRs. 54.78 billion annually. Among the investment, 83.6% is required to invest only in hotel sectors. Therefore, wider scope of tourism sector prevails in Nepal which can hold immense potential to uplift national economy (Stynes, 1997; Jones, 2013; Afthanorhan et al., 2017; Devkota et al., 2020).

Nepal has been divided into 7 provinces since 2015. Among 7 provinces, Gandaki province has been considered as major tourism hub in Nepal having major tourism destinations (Pokhara, , Mustang, Gorkha etc.) within the province. Hence, this study endeavors to prescribe the strategies to foster the hospitality sector the by assessing influence of western culture, viewpoints of tourists and expected roles of provincial government. The remaining parts of the paper are Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussions, Conclusion and Recommendations.

### **Literature review**

#### **Socio-cultural facets on tourists' drives**

The development of tourism leads to various opportunities related to economic and business (Ranasinghe, 2014; Ghanem, 2017). However, both pros and cons of rapid tourism development can be witnessed in destination countries (Ranasinghe, 2014). Tourism promotes exchange of culture, tradition among people of various regions while they visit different places which fosters friendship, learning of people among various places and increase understandings between them. Also, it encourages social development which can be beneficial for long term as tourists explore the social environment of places where they visit and even the host tries to imitate the social being of tourists. Therefore, tourism definitely affects and influence social and cultural values directly or indirectly. In one side, tourism has positive impact on the economy of the destined nation buton the other hand it can also cause threat for the society if taken further without appropriate plans and strategy (Stynes, 1997; Ranasinghe, 2014). But, tourists wants to capture, enjoy the native culture of that place where they visit. Tourism has increased the importance of cultural values. Traditional culture is one of the major attractions of tourism. So, preservation of culture and development of tourism can be, to some extent, taken as contrasting elements. According to Ånstrand (2006) sociocultural impact left by tourists are quite difficult to measure and quantify as the impact left are often qualitative and subjective in nature. Also, some researchers have regarded that socio-cultural changes impacts tourism development negatively and will cause impact in any way to host population as well (Ånstrand, 2006).

### **Socio-economic magnitudes of tourism**

Sometimes, an increased tourist flow may lead to serious negative socioeconomic and environmental consequences expressed in rape, murder, assault or depletion of local culture (Dogan, 1989; Nepal, 2000). In this regard, both homogenizing and heterogeneity effects of tourism can be witnessed in host societies (Pieterse, 2010), and former is often viewed as influence of “Westernization” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). At present, (Dogan, 1989; Hung et al, 2017; Scholte (2005) think a broad mind shift of youths about culture and values have influenced cultural identities due to globalization (Light, 2001; Tong & Cheung, 2011). In this sense, how Westernization, now as a part of globalization, influences tourist destination is illustrated with Kenyan case, which Irandu (2004) has elaborated that the as Kenya became a leading tourist destination in Africa in 1970s, local communities such as Maasai have been affected by Westernization. In opposition to such western influence, Dogan (1989) talked, in detail, about the disapproval of changes due to tourism by influential portion of local population and such reaction is resulted into the avoidance of contact by these people with foreigner; revival of old traditions, local dialects and customs, connecting them ultimately with the issue of promoting tourism and maintaining the livelihood of communities. This notion and practice is substantiated by Buck’s (1978) study on Amish community in the US (i.e. religious and traditional community) maintenance of distant relation between tourists and residents by laying an emphasis for tourists to show respect for the local and tradition life that resulted in the preservation of local culture’s coherence and integrity coupled with generating economic benefits from tourism. Further, (Pearce, 1982; Blomstrom et al., 1978) revealed that tourism has protected historical buildings in England and Panama. However, imitation of western culture have shown the negative effects of globalization on the environment, culture and social values, leading to extinct of local values, standard and importance of host nation (Peric, 2005).

### **Tourism plans in Nepal: A critical viewpoint**

The growth of tourism started in Nepal with the end of Rana system in 1950 AD. In addition, after the launch of first five year plan only further steps for tourism development and growth were brought up (NPC, 1961). However, as claimed by Upreti and Upadhyaya (2013) there were no proper blueprint developed for the tourism development in Nepal until 1970. On the other hand, in 1977 ministry of tourism and in 1978 Tourism Act focused that remarkable success in the field of tourism entrepreneurship is witnessed (Jones, 2013).

NPC (1961, 1965 & 1970) have cited that second, third and fourth plans have served as inspiration in various aspects of development and growth of tourism entrepreneurship in Nepal, such as planned development of famous touristic places;

augmentation in air transport, hotels and similar inspiration have been gained from fifth, sixth and seventh plan with the enhancement in policies. More apparently, tourism development and the sector is given more priority in the eighth plan (Pandey et al., 1995) with policies giving more importance to private sectors for tourism development (NPC, 1992). Further priority was allotted for the development of infrastructure in tourism spots highlighting new spots which are expected to welcome more number of tourists in limited number of locations (Pandey et al., 1995). 7750 tourists visited Nepal in FY 1961/62 that reached 2, 46, and 361 in FY 1989/1990 with its average annual growth rate of 13.1%. However, due to the conflict raised in the country from the year 1996 to 2006 the country received less number of tourists (NPC, 2007). Statistical record provided by Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) shows that after the first peoples' movement in 1990, annual tourism growth rate has decreased and remained by average 7% compared to average 19.6% during 1958-1990. Even the duration of residing has not been altered and remained 12 days in average throughout the period.

### **Biographical sketch of tourism in Pokhara**

In a nutshell, Nepal's first five year plan can be regarded as milestone for the tourism growth in Pokhara (NPC, 1956). Pokhara was visioned as potential tourism spot in first five year plan thus further development activities were prioritized accordingly in Pokhara (NPC, 1961). When mountain Annapurna was scaled for the first time in 1950, Pokhara got labeled as best place for mountaineering tourism which attracted attention of international tourists (Upreti & Upadhyaya, 2013) resulting Pokhara to open for mountaineers in around 1950s-1960s. Further, development of highways, trekking regions bloomed Pokhara as a major touristic hub of Nepal. Also, Liberalization policy in 1990s eased commercial activities to surroundings of Pokhara which includes Annapurna region, Dhampus, Ghandruk, Ghalegaun and Muktinath. Distinctly, to bring Pokhara at current stage, there have been series of trends and activities from government and private sectors (Upreti and Upadhyaya, 2013). Even today, various feasts and festivals allures tourists to spend their time in and around Pokhara (Upreti & Upadhyay, 2013).

### **Methodology**

This research has been conducted by using a mixed method of analysis, considering tourism entrepreneurship development in the changing context of westernization at local destination – Pokhara, Nepal. Content analysis was done by reviewing studies and documents related to tourism entrepreneurs development from a thorough internet surfing. For the larger picture of the study, the researchers have drawn secondary information from past to the recent tourism development and local entrepreneurs activities related publications.

Key informants interview and expert opinions - from Tourism Ministry, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Hotel Association Nepal (HAN), Trekking Agency Association Nepal (TAAN), Pokhara Tourism Board, and national and local tourism experts were made to strengthening and validating the issue discussed in this research.

The primary database findings were drawn from the previous cross sectional researches on the 393 tourism entrepreneurs and 249 international tourists (Devkota et al., 2020) at Lakeside, Pokhara, Nepal. The data based on the lakeside area where most of the good hotels and restaurants reside. Overall, the research mainly focuses on descriptive methodology and desk review.

### **Theoretical debate on tourism entrepreneurship**

Several researchers and theorists' insights on tourism entrepreneurship is long recognized. Multitudes of socio-cultural, political and environmental factors have been variously affecting the tourism entrepreneurship and the theories developed for entrepreneurial activities have acted upon number of variables. Various theories such as, Actor-Network Theory (1987) of Latour, Callon and Law; Practice Theory (1972) of Pierre Bourdieu's; Tourism Area Life Cycle Approach (1980) of Butler's; Stakeholders theory (1984) of Edward Freeman and John Urry's Tourist's Gaze (1992) provide critical theoretical approaches related to tourists. (Dogan, 1989; Yudina et al., 2016; Reinfeld, 2003; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Said, 2014; Thong, 2012; Durydiwka, 2014; Irandu, 2014; Arokiasamy, 2012; Cooper and Hall, 2008; Bhattarai et al., 2005; Arai &Goto, 2017) witness and critique that increasing flow of tourists has led to modernization, homogenizing, Americanization, globalization, and urbanization with wider ramification in social structure and cultural values of African and Asian societies. In the dynamic and rapidly evolving hospitality and tourism industry; entrepreneurship has a greater impact (Chen and Elston, 2013; Koh, 1996; Dogan, 1989) state that tourism entrepreneurs can aid for the social and economic development of the community where they are serving and to the nation in greater extent.

Actor Network theory renewed and showed interdisciplinary association and interest between international relation (IR) and science and technology studies (STS) on role of technology in global politics through fierce debate on three major components of ANT (i.e. Actor, Network and Theory); for which theorists concludes that would help in analyzing and identifying various tourism factors tourist involvement in different dimension of activities (Bueger & Stock bruegger 2017; Van der Duim et al., 2013; Law, 1999). The theory is also linked to various tourism activities and mobility of diverse factors such as human factor, financial factor, brandings, visual factors images) and quantitative factors (data) (Johannesson, 2005) which are accompanied by the networked relation between actors involved. Moreover,



Bourdieu (1977) mentioned Practice Theory have interestingly shown that individuals attitudes, thinking or rational calculations are no the consequences of practice but they are rather intercultural encounters as social practice that is embedded in complex structure of symbolic relation between social actors. In this regard, the founders of practice theory (Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu) regarded agency-structure relations to be important factor in social theory (Lamers et al., 2017). Further, De Clercq & Voronov's argument (2009) has consolidated the claim that Bourdieu, and Giddens have visualized the activities made by entrepreneurs of certain place would directly or indirectly impact the movement of tourists of that place.

Additionally, tourism life cycle theory of Butler (1980) asserts that unique characteristic of the entrepreneur; the prevailing environmental condition; the particular stage of destination development; and course of local socio-cultural factors are some of the factors that evolves into many types at different stages of life cycle of destination entrepreneurship. Furthermore, life cycle theory deals in accordance with the areas of entrepreneurship and business. According to Kozak & Martin (2012) product life cycle theory which goes through four stages (introduction, growth, maturity, decline) in tourism sectors shows up all tourism destinations. Again, stakeholder theory differentiates and identifies various stakeholders involved in enhancing the significance of the destination. (Law et al., 2015). In this context, Nicolaides (2015) highlighted that perception of stake holders involved have greater impact on management of tourism destination Law et al. (2015) argues that higher political influence on tourism development is witnessed and more significantly they monopolize the role of policy objective setting. Chan (2006) taking reference to John Urry's 'tourist gaze' as influential analytical phenomenon in tourism literature discusses that tourist escapes from everyday life and visits somewhere to explore new places, people or to refresh themselves.

Further, Crang (1997) regard the work of John Urry (1990) as serving to bring the constitution of looking subject into geography, which Urry's study further emphasizes on the importance of universalization of the tourist gaze denoting and constructing all sorts of places as its objects. In Nepal, (Sharma, 2013; Liechty, 2005) claim that commercialized hospitality has been observed which is against how Nepalese treats tourists with the feelings of "*Atihidebovawa*" which means 'Guest are regarded as God'.

## **Results and discussions**

### **Assessing entrepreneurs' perspective**

As Pokhara remains the major touristic destination, tourism related entrepreneurship has been substantially increased in the last few decades. But, along with the growth of the tourist and tourism entrepreneurship, the business culture of



Pokhara has been affected largely with westernization. Studies including Durydiwka (2014) and Diedrich & Aswani (2016) have revealed that culturally sound touristic destination possesses a wider scope than that of western influenced destinations. This study finds huge influence of western language, hospitality service, way of thinking and arts and decoration at Pokhara. In Bhutan, “high-value, low-impact” tourism has made substantial economic benefits (Reinfeld, 2003); In UK Sims (2009) and for China Maitland (2006) argued that local products benefit both hosts and the guests and that can improve economic and environmental sustainability. Torres (2002) has discussed that multiplier effect prevails in the economy of the destination when tourists consumes local products such as: foods, handicrafts and so on. Further, it offers socio-economic infrastructure (Endy 1998) and enhances local entrepreneurial activities. Hence, preservation of local culture increases tourist flow and enhances entrepreneurship by keeping their local values intact and promoting socio-cultural identities. Akama (2002) argues that government decision about tourism promotion, in Kenya, has significant influence on country’s tourism development. Ruhanen (2012) opined that for tourism distribution and planning, all levels of government have greater responsibility whereas Bramwell and Lane (2010) mentioned such strategies for planning and management initiatives. Such role in different level can be managed through regulation of production, consumption and investment (Young et al., 2008). Nunkoo (2015) mentions that local government should be able to create trust among communities making them feel empowered along with ensuring them to get benefit from the tourism development. No doubt, government has been a major contributor for the prosperity in tourism industry (Zhang et al., 1999).

In Pokhara, respondents opine that they have no idea about government initiatives that indicates more and crucial role from the government to aware the entrepreneurs about their plan and policies. It will help entrepreneurs to prepare for their tourism schemes and promotions. Yudina et al. (2016) stated, globalization plays important role in enhancing interaction between representatives of culture and countries where entrepreneurship is identified as a potential catalyst for expanding economic growth of the region (Arokiasamy, 2012). Tourism plays key role in the globalization of the culture (Akis, 2011) and major socio cultural phenomenon (Yudina et al., 2016). But, Stevens (1993) and Nepal and Karst (2017) argue that westernization has forced for growing cultural depletion. Such deterioration of culture can be observed considerably in Touristic destination (Zurick, 1992; Irandu, 2014). Respondents also argue that western cultural knowledge helps to understand the interest of tourist and thus to minimize the risk with customer satisfaction. However, increasing show-off, adoption of bad culture and habit, and unnecessary fashion should be minimized but contributive values should be adopted.

### **Reflecting the perspective of tourist**

Tourists' willingness to visit Nepal are various and amidst them, mountain and hill as beautiful geographical set up is the one. Regarding the reasons to visit, the main motive of tourists to travel can be emphasized with the various aspects (Poria et al., 2004). Crompton (1979); Yuan & McDonald, 1990) classify motive of travel into pull and push factors. Major chunk of the respondents (73.79%) viewing for the similarities in culture and practices of their own country with Nepal implies that westernization has considerable influence over Nepalese tourism industry. In this regard, Dogan (1989) further discussed that some third world countries even tries to attract tourists through westernization ideology for their tourism development in the cost of their socio-cultural values as well. This viewpoint is substantiated by majority of tourists' (78.22%) observation that Nepali culture is patterned with western culture. As against to this situation of cultural atmosphere as perceived by them, majority of the tourists (89.11%) have shown their dislikes on the growing westernization in Nepal. Tourists' indifference towards westernization is the fact of their preference over the native and traditional socio-cultural set up of destinations.

Tourists responded at different levels about entrepreneurship development in Nepal that few of them have observed thriving very strongly and 53.62% of tourists as existing strongly. In response to any problems as faced by the tourists in Nepal large number of the respondents (66.93%) haven't faced any problems during their visit and only 14.51% have experienced communication problems. This scenario suggests that hospitality and travel business have been painstakingly managed and promoted in Nepal by entrepreneurs and other key tourist agents. In contrary to this situation, tourists also argue that proper transportation and infrastructure development are still lacking in Pokhara. In the study, 54.03% are males and 45.96% female ones, indicating that females too have higher rate of movement as tourists. Female travel behavior (Aitchison & Reeves, 1998; Zhang et al., 2008) is disproportionately constrained by fearful mind set for their personal safety while travelling (Wilson & Little, 2008). As against the average duration of the stay in Nepal by tourist (i.e., 13 days) in 2017, our study revealed such stay is 30.62 days, which throws the light that tourists are increasingly preferring Nepal with their likelihood of longer stay. In such manner of stay practice, Nepal's (2000) assertion is more informative and important that high-budget tourists make short duration visit with pack-age trips, whereas majority of low-budget visit is from the tourists who are independent and plan for much longer stay.

### **Undertakings of Gandaki province government**

This study on tourism business in Pokhara resulted that tourism business has been affected by new government system. Tourism entrepreneurs (99%) revealed

they have been facing complexities due to increase in tax procedural which has been additional burden for them (Devkota et al., 2020). In this regard, tax seems to have creating negative effect on tourism (Forsyth & Dwyer, 2002). Further, though tax seems creating negative effect on tourism, tourism tax can be categorized in various sectors (Bird, 1992). Pokhara is considered major tourism hub in Nepal, therefore government should create favorable environment to support tourism entrepreneurs. In Nepal, international tourism has been encouraged by the government to greater extent (Stevens, 1988). However, proper plans, policies and guidelines should be provided by government in order to protect, promote and encourage tourism entrepreneurship in Pokhara. Exploration of the expectations of tourism entrepreneurs serves as the highlight of this section. Lordkipanidze et al. (2005) devised the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. These strengths and opportunities indicates that in order to promote and protect local values of Pokhara entrepreneurs as well as government from every level (local, provincial, central) should pay proper attention and play effective role from their respective side. To enhance and appeal country's major visiting point deliberate effort is required from government. Similarly, provincial government should further add activities and destinations that would attract more domestic as well as foreign tourists and retain tourists to spend additional days in Pokhara. Provincial government can also upgrade the existing facilities like paragliding, zip flyers, mountain flights, religious sites etc. which would encourage tourists to visit Pokhara again.

Despite major strength and opportunities in tourism sector in Pokhara, the city is not untouch from weaknesses and threats. Whether tourism entrepreneurs of Pokhara should include and promote westernization or not is still the part of debate of this paper. However, this study affirms preservation of socio-cultural values, local identity for the sustainability of the entrepreneurship. Yet, there is always scope for further research in the same issue. The study also identified that effect of westernization have already started prevailing in Pokhara due to the lack of coordination and communication between entrepreneurs and government levels. According to WTTC (2015) Government have laid clear hierarchical system that have strong influence on government bodies as well as general public. Also, various threats related to security, unmanaged urbanization, pollution, preservation of touristic spots are to be taken in to consideration by entrepreneurs. Provincial government should play strong role in order to mitigate these complexities by involving stakeholders as well. Tourism sector in Nepal if promoted and explored to full capacity has potential to minimize rate of poverty and generate employment opportunities through various scale entrepreneurship leading to sustainability and prosperity in tourism and for entrepreneurs (Sherpa, 2006; Koh and Hatten, 2002; Lordkipanidze et al., 2005; Sherpa, 2006). In order to develop Pokhara as major tourist destination and develop it

further, government should start working to formulate plans to promote it nationally and internationally through maintenance and up gradation and preservation of its natural, economical, cultural and social values. 33% of Bachelors level students were respondents for the study, which is considered to be quite astonishing from education perspective for this particular study (Devkota et al., 2020), emphasizing tourism entrepreneurship is moving towards positive direction in Pokhara. Therefore, tourism awareness can be significant for making tourism industry stronger in the country. Thus, result shows good level of competency is profounded among tourism entrepreneurs in Pokhara and they are able to communicate and handle problems if occurred.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Current study investigates evidence of westernization from the perspective of foreign tourists in touristic city-Pokhara, Nepal. The majority of the respondents suggest safeguarding the local values; culture would help tourism entrepreneurship to boom. The tourists advise entrepreneurs that they should recognize, preserve, promote and sustain their own practices with priority. Westernization has substantially affected businesses in Pokhara. How eastern socio-cultural values can be preserved in tourism business has become the major challenge for the local authorities. With the ample evidences based on preceding data analysis, it reveals that the registration of their business, business effect, government initiatives, minimization of westernization and population growth affect tourism entrepreneurship in Pokhara. This study indicates greater possibility to accommodate tourism entrepreneurship in Pokhara and abreast, entrepreneurs should not forget the local Nepali socio-cultural tradition.

Also, the newly designed provincial government of Nepal should pay attention in preservation of local socio and cultural aspects of Pokhara. Without proper understanding of government backing and correct understanding, it is pretty difficult to develop tourism entrepreneurship. Therefore, government should try to understand experience and expectations of entrepreneurs and create feasible environment. Result further uncovers there are various procedural complexities, lack of effective plans, compliance with new government, problems of unmanaged urbanization which have been major obstacles for development and sustainability of tourism entrepreneurship. Which means the development is only possible in long run if both entrepreneurs and government walk hand in hand.

The findings of this study can serve in policy making for different government agencies such as: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation; Ministry of Industries, Commerce and Supplies; Department of Tourism, Nepal Tourism Board, Hotel Association Nepal, Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal, Pokhara Tourism Council, Government of Gandaki Province, Pokhara Metropolitan City, Travel and

Tours Association and *Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce & Industries (FNCCI)* and *FNCCI Province 4 (Gandaki Pradesh) Pokhara and entrepreneurs' bodies of Pokhara and Nepal at large*. It remains asset in business culture of touristic city of Nepal by the illuminating results presented under western influence in Pokhara in terms of tourism entrepreneurship, existing business scenario, preservation of local culture, measures for sustainable tourism entrepreneurship and after all, promoting local culture and values. The following factors are worth considering for the betterment of Pokhara:

1. **Prompt and quality tourist services:** Tourists' guide can contribute tourists for visiting different touristic spots of Pokhara. In visiting tourism destination in and outside Pokhara the provision of multiple registrations should be avoided. They should be given prompt and quality services. The provincial government has to administer justifiable cost of transportation, entry tickets and similar issues. The hotel should provide quality service in food and accommodation.
2. **Infrastructure development:** If we consider tourist respondents' opinion they advise that infrastructure like roads, town planning, business and registration area, parameters for buildings should be developed. The construction should be controlled and modeled in order to preserve local socio-cultural views and values.
3. **Preservation of local socio-cultural values:** The conservation of local socio-cultural beliefs plays lively roles in stimulating tourism entrepreneurship. Nepal's traditional architectures, local arts and culture have always allured tourists. Likewise, various customs, traditions have enhances Nepal's beauty through promoting harmony in cultural diversity. The values that are created by traditional architecture of Nepalese buildings, palaces, temples hold authentic values among tourists and holds remarkable aura in the heart of tourists. Also, the hospitality given by Nepalese community to tourists, their warm welcome, friendly gestures, vivid culture like music, dance, food, festivals and many more has always appealed tourists.. Local Gurung and Newar community cultures can be accommodated in tourists business and specially to provide the tourists. In terms of social aspects the local community people can involve, protect, sustain and uplift their lifestyle. They can preserve their identity and remain proud of their own values and background.
4. **Formulating proper tourism plan and policies:** In recent years remarkable tourism development can be witnessed, however proper plans and policies for sustainable development are still lacking. As new tax procedures are considered as burden by tourists, provincial government should therefore make proper

strategy, proper plans, clear vision for registering VAT, tax and operation of business to support tourism entrepreneurs and tourism entrepreneurship. As mentioned by Sherpa (2006) government should initiate public private partnership (PPP) including local communities as well in order to develop tourism sector sustainably. Likewise, there should be coordination among various tourism related agencies such as: Nepal Tourism Board, Tourism Ministry, international and domestic airports, travel agencies and different boards and committees for the flourishing of tourism entrepreneurship in Pokhara and to handle various issues arising in the field.

5. **Inter-state coordination:** As Nepal is divided into seven provinces recently; different provinces have their different tourism destinations. Some destinations hold higher significance among tourists whereas, some holds less. However, tourism board, agencies of every province should have proper coordination and interconnection for the development of each destination. Jones (2013) urged that there is lack of proper coordination, management and communication among government and private agencies and associations, as well as between private organizations. But, according to Chen et al. (2018) tourism is such sector which requires good relation and networks from individual level to enterprise level. Some of the tourism destinations that hold high significance and should be promoted with the mutual cooperation and coordination among tourism agencies of all the provinces nationally and internationally. Such as, in province one destinations like: Illam, Pathivara, Mount Everest, Kanchanjanga holds higher significance ; similarly, province two highlights Ram Janaki temple as its major religious tourism attraction; In Bagmati Pradesh, Sauraha, Pashupatinath, Syambhunath and Durbar squares of Kathmandu Valley holds its different traditional and natural importance; whereas, Gandaki Pradesh is regarded as tourism hub of Nepal. Pokhara and Muktinath, Annapurna Base Camp, attracts maximum number of tourists throughout the year; Province 5 emphasizes Lumbini, Swargadwari, SupaDeurali, Rani Mahal, Bardiya National Park as their touristic spots; For province 6 Bulbul Tal, Rara Lake and Sinja Valley holds tourism importance and Khaptad valley in province 7 attracts tourists by its natural beauty. Therefore, each provinces and concerned tourism agencies, entrepreneurs, businesses should have proper connection for promotion and sustainability of these destinations while exploring and promoting new as well.
6. **Developing Pokhara as tourism hub:** After being highlighted in the five-year plan, tourism development has been regarded as prioritized sector. However, to the present date Pokhara has not been able to be established and executed as tourism hub as mentioned. Therefore, now the attention of concerned



authorities should be dragged to establish and execute Pokhara as major tourism hub of Nepal. Based on tourists feedback they like Pokhara a lot. Hence, it is easy to promote as tourists hub based on the interest of the tourists. The provincial government and central government should work hand in hand for developing policies as tourists' hub. The value for the tourists and systematic provision of nightlife and recreational activities should be availed to the tourists.

7. **Business security for entrepreneurs:** As mentioned by Stynes (1997) government along with local community plays crucial role in the development of tourism business of particular place and the development of tourism business is really important aspect for Nepalese economic growth (Paudyal, 2012). Therefore, provincial government should come up with supporting ideas; campaigns to promote, encourage, motivate tourism business and entrepreneurship in Pokhara by implementing clear and appropriate policies, regulations, waiver schemes, reimbursement in taxes, controlling corruption, proper business securities.
8. **Development and conservation of tourist points:** Pokhara is also called 'the city of beautiful lakes' and 'true heaven of earth'. Being bounded with natural beauty, Pokhara has many natural tourism attractions which include *Fewa Lake*, *Begnas Lake*, *Mahendra cave*, *Bat cave*, *David's Fall*, *Sarangkot*, gifted by mother nature. Similarly, *White Stupa*, and *Bindabasini temple* have their own religious importance. Therefore, these destinations have potential to attract more tourists in future as well. Hence, these spots should be kept into consideration by government and should preserve them by any means possible. The construction, renovation and maintaining tourist friendly visit are of prime importance.
9. **Quality hospitality service:** For the sustainable business customer satisfaction is very important. Therefore, tourists should be provided with warm hospitality, quality services, and facilities, appropriate and adequate information. Tourism entrepreneurs, business persons, employees engaged in tourism sectors should be trained and aware about the importance of hospitality in tourism sector. Also, they should be provided with tourism etiquettes trainings and workshops.
10. **Balancing westernization:** Present study portrayed that from the perspective of tourism entrepreneurs, tourists prefer to explore and enjoy local values, culture of Pokhara rather than western values. So, provincial government should motivate and promote tourism entrepreneurs to incorporate tourism activities, foods, beverages, accommodation that reflects local culture



rather than copying western style. Similar policies should be formulated by government to bring these things into practice and preserve local values and tradition in Pokhara. But the evidence in the research shows that westernization is increasing in Pokhara. When such copy of the west increases tourists will not be able to witness the local socio-cultural factors and visiting Pokhara can gradually be in less priority.

**11. National and international promotion:** Though Pokhara receives numerous tourists every year, it is only on seasonal basis. It still requires national and international publicity and advertisement regarding the beauty of Pokhara city so that it could welcome tourists throughout the globe any season throughout the year. In that sense, various marketing approaches could boost tourism flow in Pokhara throughout the year (Peric, 2005). Proper advertisement through well maintained websites of hotels, travel agencies, proper provision of money exchange services, quality services and facilities, Proper data and internet or international telephone facilities could help in upgradation of tourists flow in Pokhara.

**12. Environment conservation and sustainability:** Entrepreneurship, tourists and environment can be said to be interlinked. As major tourism spots of Pokhara are naturally gifted it can serve sustainably only if they are preserved and maintained on continuous basis. As stated by Afthanorhan et al. (2017) that the relation between tourism, environment and socio-cultural dynamics is unbreakable, they hold strong connection within themselves. Therefore, for the development and sustainability of tourism enterprises the rapid growth in the population, impingement of tourist centers for settlement, business and personal benefit illegally, increasing pollutions, degradation in the environment and unmanaged urbanization should be mitigated.

Hence this study predicts that if the local socio-cultural aspects are preserved only then it is possible to grow tourism entrepreneurship in Pokhara, Nepal.

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**THE GAZE**  
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## COVID-19 Global Pandemic Lockdown Impact on Visit Nepal Year 2020: A Review

**Deepak Gautam**

Institute of Forestry, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara Campus Pokhara, Nepal

*dgautam@iofpc.edu.np*

**Aarati Khatri**

*aaratikhatri9867@gmail.com*

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### Abstract

*Tourism sector, a major backbone in revenue generation in Nepal having an immense potentiality is hardly hit by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has suspended Visit Nepal Year 2020, with a theme, an experience of a life-time. This remarkable campaign is also a national development strategy in the tourism history of Nepal which aimed at attracting around 2 million foreigners from all over the world. This article is designed to explore about COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown impacts on tourism industries and Visit Nepal year 2020 Campaign. For these, secondary literature available in Google Scholar, Research Gate and, recently published newspapers were accessed. The result shows that the unprecedented and uncertain lockdown stuck millions of people in their home, lower the economic activities of different sectors of the tourism industry including hotels, homestays, travel and tours, impact on remittance, a collapse of small industries and suspension of mega projects and many more. In addition to this, this paper aims at showcasing a strong correlation between lockdown and tourism industry with perspective from Nepal Tourism Board, Academic*

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### Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
*kunwar.dr@gmail.com*

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*practitioner, Tourism Entrepreneurs, Nepal government, ministries, Economist and Analyst to revise the protocols and safety standard of the tourism industry to massively flourish and revive amidst the pandemic and even in the post-pandemic environment.*

## **Introduction**

Nepal is a mountainous country and is mesmerizingly endowed with a natural aesthetic, has immense natural beauty and, a high level of cultural and biological diversity, heritage, and unbeatable traditional gastronomy. The exceptional trekking routes, mountaineering, wilderness area, adventure tourism, climatic condition, multi-ethnic values, rich bio-diversity flora, and fauna, snow-fed rivers are the valuable assets of the country (Shrestha, 2017). Tourism is the cornerstone to articulate the nationhood representing the authentic national cultures. It is also a country of “as many people as many gods and goddesses, as many temples as many houses, as many festivals as many days of the years”.

Tourism has extended in Nepal since ancient to medieval to modern time. The development of tourism extended broader after the conquest of the Mt. Everest by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Edmunds Hillary in 1952. The first tourism board was established in 1958 and the first tourism plan was brought in 1972 (Nepal, 2010). After that first Visit Nepal year was held in 1998 which received about 450,000 tourists skyrocketing the Nepalese economy. In 2002, “destination Nepal” was also celebrated (Gautam, 2005). In 2011 also Nepal tourism year was celebrated. In 2017 alone, Nepal witnessed a record 9, 40,000 visitors, creating more than 427,000 jobs and pumping Nepali Rs. 177 billion (1 US dollar = Rs 122) into the economy (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019). After a glorious success of Tourism Year ‘Visit Nepal 2011’ and ‘Visit Nepal 1998’, a new tourism campaign was announced by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, Nepal with an aim to promote Nepal as a Tourism Destination. Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual country that consists of 125 Ethnic groups, more than 5 religious groups being over 80% Hindu and 123 languages spoken all over Nepal which makes it peculiar for attracting the tourist all over the world to observe the lifestyle of people of Nepal (National Census, 2011).

Nepal was in its climax for planning to celebrate Visit Nepal 2020, an eminent project which aimed at attracting around 2 million foreign tourists to the economically dependent naturally blessed country who believes in “*Atithidewobhwa*” which means that guest is the epitome of the God in Nepal (Roy, 2009). This campaign had immense hope to uplift Nepal’s tiny economy with a GDP of just \$30 billion by bagging home a predicted amount of \$2 billion (Visit Nepal, 2020). Most of the VNY 2020 strategic plan that aimed at creating about 20-lifetime experiences like Opening of Gautam Buddha Airport, Organizing an aerial sports competition, Conducting

highest altitude musical concert on earth, organizing of the Nepal Tourism Excellence Awards and the Nepal Tourism Investment Summit, etc (Visit Nepal, 2020) all were halted due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic from Wuhan of China on 31st December 2019 (Dhami et al., 2020). The Visit Nepal 2020 campaign was also planned in order to revitalize Nepal's tourism industry after the massive destruction by earthquakes of 2015. After the disaster, the government of Nepal announces 2017 and 2018 as Visit Nepal Years to assure more no. of tourists to bounce the tourism industry after the earthquake. But According to National Planning Commission 2019, there were very less infrastructures and facilities to warmly welcome the huge number of tourist. So the Ministry of Tourism postponed this campaign to assure complete development of all the infrastructures like road, upgradation of airports, repairing of all the historical sites and heritages, completion of all mega projects and many more not to leave any room for improvement to welcome the tourist. But all these planning and preparation finally came to an end on coffin after the wake of Coronavirus Pandemic all over the world

After the Second World War, the recent global concern COVID-19 dragged the human life towards extinction with the death increasing in logarithmic scale. COVID-19, an acute respiratory disease is striking the entire world by threatening human existence. It's commencing stage is linked with the wet market in 'Wuhan of Eastern China'. It was declared 'Outbreak' by Public Health Emergency of International concern on 30th January 2020 and recognized as 'Pandemic' on 11 March 2020 by World Health Organization. COVID-19 stands for Corona Virus Disease-19, '19' specifying identification date on 31st December 2019 (McIntosh, 2020). China, being the pioneer for releasing this bio-weapon and making earth inhabitable which resulted in 7,896,400 COVID-19 cases reported in 213 countries and the territories (WHO, 2020). There are altogether 432,887 deaths testing the limits of the hospital system and can claim an uncountable population if not controlled. Luckily 4,056,404 have already recovered (WHO, 2020). Human life is so sensitive that even a small microscopic virus-like Corona can threaten whole human existence. COVID-19 has engulfed the world with restrictions in human movements, locked down '1/3rd' of the world, clogged national and international flights, closed schools, ceased seminars, gatherings and, even closed religious aspects of mankind. The COVID-19 has shown the tourism industry a blind spot by striking it with harsh reality since January 1 of 2020 and has turned all the tourism-dependent communities in a crisis.

Now, the tourist will no longer roam around the bustling cities admiring the hospitality and spending a huge dollars leaving behind the memories and boasting the selfless hospitality of Nepalese people all around the world. The empty hotels, streets, historical places, accommodation providers, museums, recreation centers, airports now resemble the ghost town.

The objectives of this review article are (a) To assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic to Visit Nepal 2020 (b) To assess the possible loss of income of tourism industries due to COVID-19.

### **Methodology**

This review paper study has been conducted to find out the adverse impact on tourism future of the country with the cancellation of Visit Nepal 2020, one of the remarkable campaigns in the tourism history of Nepal. This study is simply design based on the secondary literature review of tourism of Nepal and COVID-19 pandemic related news and articles published in daily newspapers, online portals (Timilsina et al., 2020) data available in different websites of Ministry of Tourism, Nepal before June 30, 2020. Collected data were qualitatively analyzed and presented in table and figures.

### **Discussions**

The Tourism industry along with other financial institutions is tremendously sensitive to the different environmental uncertainties like a crisis, natural disasters, wars, social conflicts, epidemics, terrorisms (Huang et al., 2008). In this 21st century, climate change and global health emergencies are the recognized drivers to fluctuate the future of the Tourism Industry. Tourism, being the seasonal industry that is most active during April-March now has frozen due to on-going pandemic (Jamal & Budke, 2020) People now satire 'Visit the Year 2020' as 'Sit Nepal 2020' due to the on-going uncertain pandemic lockdown. The tourism sector is of immense potentiality i.e. profitable yet risky to a crisis (Jallat & Shultz, 2011).

Most of the large budget projects of Nepal like Fast track road to Nijgadh, Gautam Buddha International Airport in Lumbini, Tribhuvan International Airport Capacity Building and, Pokhara Regional International Airport and few reconstructions and repairing process ongoing at Tribhuvan International Airport to welcome a huge number of tourists have been halted with fear of the spread of Coronavirus.

Most of the minor industries are now on the verge of collapse as even the domestic tourists are not allowed to travel. A developing country like Nepal is likely to suffer from tourism demand fluctuation. This pandemic is the worst crisis that has ever hit in the history of the Nepal tourism industry. With the speculation more than hard facts, this pandemic is a blind spot with infinity despair. People are asking money refund from their flight, no business, piled up of interest on a loan, the salary cuts, cancellation of holidays, remittance dropped results to less chance of rebound of the tourism industry.

This global pandemic has obstructed the five sectors which were separated by the Nepal government for the overall success of this campaign Visit Year 2020, to equally



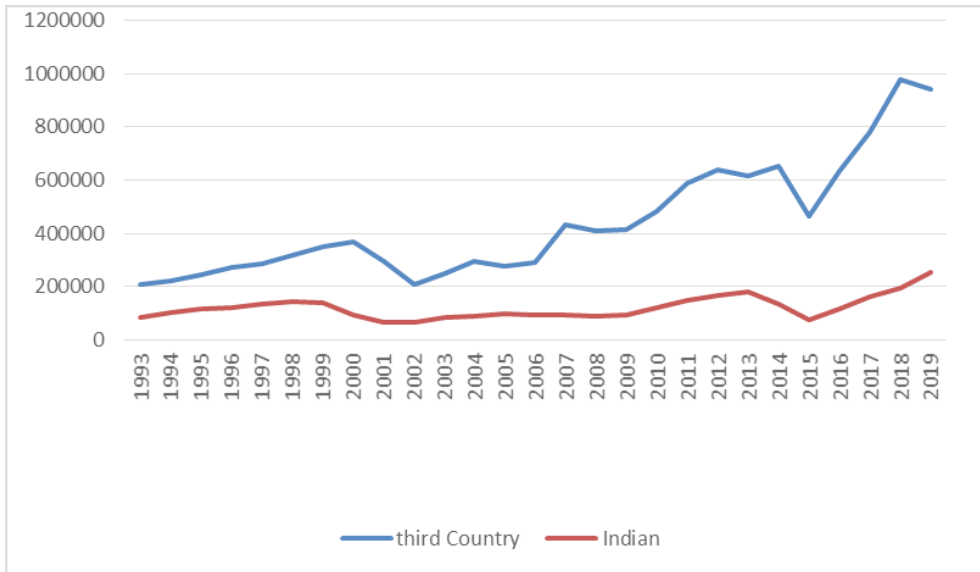
promote and develop all the sectors of this area. It includes People & Heritages, Nature & Wildlife, Culture Cities & leisure, Religion & Pilgrimage, and lastly Adventure and Outdoor (Visit Nepal, 2020)

### **National and International arrivals**

It's a bad news for national and international travels as the international flights will be suspended and the internal borders will be sealed until June-30 as said by Energy Minister of Nepal. Out of 49 airports in Nepal where 7 are under construction, 17 are non-functional and 32 are in operation till 2020 according to Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019). The top arrivals of visitors in Nepal is from the country like India, China, Srilanka, USA and UK (Visit Nepal, 2020). In the beginning of 2019, the total tourist arrival by month in January was 81,273 (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019) which drastically reduced to 79,686 with 2% drop compared to 2019 in January, 2020 (Nepal Tourism Board, 2020) which was also the initiation phase of global pandemic as shown in the Fig 1. In 2017, Nepal welcomed 940,218 foreign tourists (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019) which expects a growth of foreign tourists by 30 percent every year to meet the target of 1.5 million tourists by 2020 to successfully run the campaign Visit Nepal 2020.

The government issued a travel advisory against 'non-essential' travel due to which a large number of tourist from China, India, Iran, South Korea, Japan, Italy get restricted that has led to the suspension of the promotional campaign of Visit Nepal 2020. The Nepalese tourism industry is the first casualty that has been hit hard by COVID-19. A single tourist spends US 45\$ daily in Nepal (MoCTCA, 2019) and the Visit Nepal 2020 had targeted to encourage tourist to invest 75\$ per day which has changed into null at present.

Nepal have a wide range of opportunity to flourish the tourism industry as it is strategically positioned between the two of the country having largest economy in the world that is India and China. China, also the pioneer for this pandemic is the second highest contributor of tourists i.e. 14.37% to the economy in Nepal but with the travel restrictions and lockdown is heavily suffering (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The long history of the social and political relationship between Nepal and China have made the china the second largest country to contribute in the tourism sector in the recent years (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019)

**Fig 1: Travel arrival by year from 1993-2019**

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019

Nepal has been witnessing the rapid increasing of the tourism in 2019 with the promotion of Visit Nepal 2020 as the total no of Tourist increased from 1,173,072 in 2018 to the total number of 1,197,191 in 2019 (Department of Immigration, 2019). The total of 2, 10,205 visitors from third countries and 83,362 visitors from India only travelled to Nepal in the year 1993. With the increasing number of International and National airports and the civil services the total number jumped to 943041 visitors from third world countries and 25,4150 visitors from India alone due to the availability of easier transportation in the year 2019 making Indian visitors prominent traveler in the tourism activities of Nepal as illustrated in the Fig. 2. But the number have declined to zero due to the sealed border between Nepal and India

### Hotels and restaurant sector

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) Nepal's economy is estimated to grow by 2.7% only if all the sectors except hotels and restaurants and international travel move towards normalization from Mid-May. The decline in the business amid the coronavirus pandemic have led all the hotels and restaurants of the country including the renowned well ambianced 5 stars hotel like Hyatt Regency, Radisson and Marriort are closed till the situation improves to normal. The hospitality industries have been brutally blown away, the hotel owners are pleading and the hotels have been severely suffering from this crisis as compared to previous strong performance in 2019. All the hotels of the country will be shut down till Mid- November as declared

by the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN). About 5.2% of Nepal’s total employment and 4.4 % of the total loans by the bank is hold by hotels and restaurant. Resuming all the commercial activities, transport, hotels admits lockdown is pretty hopeless. There was around 110-star hotel with 10715 bed capacity and 886 tourist standard hotel with 28392 bed capacities back in the year 2004 which drastically increased to a total of 138-star hotel with 13,200 bed capacities and tourist standard hotel with 30799 bed capacity in the recent year 2019 as illustrated in the graph (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019). As the future of the lockdown has inflicted an unprecedented amount of uncertainty, it has led to the closure of both star hotels and tourist standard hotels. According to the Shreejana Rana, President of Hotel Association Nepal, the pandemic has completely down the hotel and restaurant sector as the inflow of the foreign tourist has interrupted.

**Holy places of Nepal**

Out of the five sectors that were included to promote in the Visit Nepal 2020, The Religion and Pilgrimage is also the one. The main holy places that have been obstructed by this pandemic are:

**Table 1: Major holy places of Nepal with Visitors**

S.N	Lumbini	Pashupatinath
Year	Visitors From Other Countries	Visitors From Other Countries Except India
2011	16,867	143,887
2012	17,924	139,885
2013	9685	156,858
2014	14,154	1,66,173
2015	13,317	78,680
2016	18,007	95,411
2017	13,032	1,24,180
2018	19,279	1,63,311
2019	14,738	1,71,937

*Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019 and Modified*

**Lumbini**

The birthplace of Gautam Buddha, also known as “Light of Asia” is one of the major attractions for the tourist all around the world. Lumbini was listed in the World Heritage sites in 1997 as the archeological remains which were unearthed in the last century preserved in the site provides the evidence of the pilgrimage from

the 3rd century B.C. (Kanno, 2006). Lumbini, a world heritage site is a destination for pilgrimage and religious tourism which belongs to everyone in the world as concluded by (Ghimire, 2006).in his research entitled “Lumbini: A touristic overview”. Visit Lumbini 2012 was an appropriate platform for publicizing Nepal in the National and International tourism market. About 1.5 million tourist visited Lumbini from India, Nepal and from third countries in 2019 (The Rising Nepal, 2020). But with the cancellation of campaign, the figures have completely declined.

### **Pashupatinath temple**

The sacred place was established on 477A.D with the beginning of Lichhavi kings in the history of Nepal (Nyaupane, 2019). The popularity of this sacred place is due to its ancientness, mythologies, and unshakable religious faith. Every year a huge mass of cultural tourists visits this holy place as their act of devotion. It is also the focal point for many Hindus all over the world having immense social-cultural, historical, aesthetic, and religious values. It is one among the major religious and pilgrimages destination for Hindus precisely for Saivamargis (Nyaupane, 2019)

In 2011, there were total of 63, 709 visitors from India and 16, 867 from third countries who visited Lumbini. Similarly, in 2019, the total Indian visitors increased to 2, 04,825 while there was a decline in the number of visitors from third country that counts to 14, 738 in number. Also 143887 Indian visitors visited the Pashupatinath temple in the year 2011 which increased to 171937 numbers of visitors in 2019. Around 1.5 million visited Pashupatinath temple in only 2 weeks during Mahashivaratri in 2019 (The Kathmandu Post, 2020). Similarly, another holy place Multipath, a sacred pilgrimage place for both Hindus and Buddhist all over the world was visited by 59,838 foreign visitors in the year 2018 which declined to 57,565 visitors in the year 2019 as stated by TulasiDahal, Chief of Jomsom office of Annapurna Conservation Project.

### **National park and conservation areas**

The two national parks of Nepal namely Chitwan National park and Sagarmatha National Park has been listed in world heritage sites in 1984 and 1979 respectively by UNESCO. The world famous national park, Chitwan National park, Bardiya National park, Parsa Wildlife reserve and many more which is also the home of many endangered animals like Bengal Tiger, One-Horned Rhinoceros, Bengal Fox, Red Panda, Snow leopard etc where one can enjoy forest lifestyle and among which jungle safaris, Chitwan Jungle Safari is the most popular (Pokharel et al., 2017). This all national park having biodiversity host spots is all shut down and is under the dark shadow of lockdown which is more likely to cause severe loss in economy.

**Table.2. Number of Foreign visitors to major protected areas of Nepal**

Conservation Area	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Chitwan National Park	178257	87391	139125	118621	142486
Bardiya National Park	13548	10638	17959	6773	8260
Langtang National Park	12265	5016	8254	10619	12132
Sagarmatha National Park	34412	27794	45112	56303	57289
Rara National Park	143	132	201	317	421
Annapurna Conservation Area	114418	83419	144409	172720	181746
Manaslu Conservation Area	5658	2287	5745	7200	7655
Gaurishanker Conservation Area	2818	1840	2770	2668	2528
<b>Total</b>	<b>361519</b>	<b>218517</b>	<b>363, 575</b>	<b>374,951</b>	<b>412,487</b>

(Source: Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation, Tourism Statistics 2019).

The number of visitors in the major national park and conservation areas were 3, 61,519 in the fiscal year 2015/2016 which increased to 4,12,487 in the fiscal year 2019/2020 due to the alluring biodiversity provided by these conservation areas.

### **Trekking and mountaineering**

From few years, the visitors from the Western and South Asian mostly the Chinese, Japanese and Korean have shown their keen interest on different recreational or adventurous activities like mountaineering, trekking, rafting, ecotourism, canyoning, bungee jumping (Shrestha2020) that have brought huge foreign currency in Nepal. The Best Recommended Hiking trail for Visit Nepal 2020 like Everest base camp helicopter tour ,Everest base camp trek, Annapurna Base Camp Trek, Ghorepani Poonhill trek, KhopraDanda Trek, EBC Chola Pass ,Gokyo Lake Trek, Annapurna Circuit trek, Langtang valley trek, Mardi Himal Trek, Upper mustang trek, Gosainkunda pass etc trekking routes are now empty without trekkers now .Nepal has also suspended the Everest permit over the COVID-19 issue and stopped issuing the tourist visas because of the fear that the virus may travel through the visas. The permits bring millions of dollars to Nepal every year. It is also considered as the good decision made by the government of Nepal because if more infected people enter in Nepal which can result in outbreak, then there will be 10 times more accident and same level of damage in the country according to Mingma Sherpa, Chairman of Seven Summit trek. According to Santa Bir Lama, President of Nepal Mountaineering Association, more than 3500

travel and trekking agencies have been shut down across the country that contributes to the 600 million annually to the tourism sector due to nationwide lockdown.

In 2019, 397 members climbed Mount Everest bringing home 405800 USD royalty. Around 922 trekkers choose Mustang, 488 in Lower Dolpa, 119 in Upper Dolpa, 337 in Humla, 798 in Manaslu and 690 in Kanchenjunga were found trekking in the year 2001. With the promotion of Visit Nepal 2020 campaign all over the world, the number increased to 3739 in Mustang, 1263 in Lower Dolpa, 530 in Upper Dolpa, 8670 in Humla, 6070 in Manaslu, 911 in Kanchenjunga. The rates for tour or trekking packages for Visit Nepal 2020 were lower and affordable compared to other years. So, that the Visitors can have wonderful tour and trekking packages at the costs which they have not imagined (Trekking Association of Nepal, 2020) but all these offers are valueless now.

Homestays one of the natural pattern of observing behavioral patterns of rural lifestyle with carries a theme serve what you have (Shrestha, 2017). According to Ministry of tourism, Nepal, 2018 there are altogether 324 homestays and around 800 private homestays, affecting around 40,000 employments during lockdown. As the crisis have plagued the whole world, the homestay are nearly collapsing that have hold the identity of many ethnic communities in Nepal like Gurung, Magar, Sherpa etc. due to the restriction in public movement. There will be dramatic effects on various small scale service sectors.

### **Economic loss due to COVID-19 pandemic in tourism industries**

**Table: 3. Foreign exchanging from tourism industry**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Foreign Exchange Earning from tourism (Rs. in millions)</b>	<b>As%oftotal Foreign Exchange Earnings</b>	<b>As % of GDP</b>
2009/10	28,139.0	6.0	2.4
2010/11	24,611.0	4.9	1.8
2011/12	30,703.8	4.5	1.8
2012/13	34,210.6	4.5	2
2013/14	46,374.9	4.7	2.4
2014/15	53,428.8	4.9	2.5
2015/16	41,765.4	3.7	1.9
2016/17	58,526.9	4.5	2.3
2017/18	67,094.6	9.9	2.2

Year	Total Foreign Exchange Earning from tourism (Rs. in millions)	As%oftotal Foreign Exchange Earnings	As % of GDP
2018/19	75,808.6	11.2	
2019/20*	42,736.9	6.3	

Source: Nepal Rastra Bank, \*1<sup>st</sup> six month of FY 2076/77, Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2019

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the Travel and tourism sector contributes around 240 billion rupees into Nepal's economy and supports over 1 million job opportunities but this lockdown has created an ultimatum for the naturally bliss, eco-friendly, adventurous and natural business like tourism. The downfall of the economy is even worse than this virus. Skyrocketing stock markets have now completely declined. The COVID-19 outbreak has caused the global recession in 2020 that can further lead to the worst scenario which was once triggered in the economic crisis as of 2008-2009. As of 2019, there were 1.17 million tourists in Nepal. (MoCTCA, 2020). The tourism industry earns about 25% of the total foreign exchange and creates more than 2,00,000 direct employment to the people making it an inseparable and distinctive place in the Nepalese economy (Asian Development Bank, Report 2019). A detailed report by the World Bank and KNOMAD in April 2020 forecast that Nepal's remittance will drop by 14% in 2020 because of the pandemic.

### Significance of the paper

This paper emerges out to compare the effect of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on diverse area of the tourism sector of Nepal and in Visit Nepal 2020, a remarkable campaign of with more than 10 years of data in the relevant field and also provides a way forward to flourish tourism industry in the crisis as well as in the post-pandemic environment. The findings suggested that the tourism industry is very profitable yet risky to a crisis.

### Limitation of the paper

The limitation of this paper is that the data were taken during an ongoing pandemic and past data. So, it is very hard to speculate the conclusion of this unprecedented future of this pandemic.

### Conclusion

The arrival of COVID-19, which is seen to be fretful as well as fatal to human health, has adversely affected the Visit Nepal Campaign- 2020 by creating a cessation in the number of tourists. It's high time to rethink and reboot tourism towards a better pathway for the future. The world will recover sooner or later from the pandemic just



like the elastic rubber that rebounds after it reaches to the maximum capacity. It's totally up to us whether to take this pandemic as a golden opportunity to uplift the tourism more sustainably. Visit Nepal 2020 is the dissolution of opportunity as well as challenges to revitalize the economy. Tourism sector may be down at present but not completely out. Tourism entrepreneurs have invested a huge amount of money to make 'Visit Nepal 2020' project a lifetime experience in the history of Nepal. The government had allocated Rs 650 million (1\$=Rs122) for the campaign for this fiscal year only which ends mid-July,2020 which should be now used to provide the incentives and should use as post- recovery fund for revival of tourism sector after pandemic. Following the government instruction and WHO guidelines and also following the "COVID-19 safety and Hygiene protocol for tourism industry" introduced by the Nepal Tourism Board, 2020 will work wonders to survive, revive, and prosper this global crisis and kick-start the industry with greater enthusiasm even than before. In future the immense attention is needed from various Governmental bodies, Non-Governmental bodies, political parties, different professionals, resident and non-resident, Red Cross, academicians and practitioners, Nepalese Citizens, foreign citizens to be prepared for the response to large disaster of disease and death that can collapse many sector.

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# THE GAZE

JOURNAL OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

## A Preliminary Study of Pilgrimage Tourism in Barahachhetra, Nepal

Ramesh Raj Kunwar

kunwar.dr@gmail.com

Nabin Thapaliya

nabinthapaliya@gmail.com

'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (Turner & Turner, 1978, p.20; in Kunwar, 2017, p. 323)

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### Article History

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### Abstract

*Pilgrimage is an age-old phenomenon for people of all religions. Pilgrimage is often been defined as a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding. For the Hindus, Pilgrimage is associated with Moksha (liberation), one of the four Purusharthas (virtues), the other three being Artha (material value) Dharma (righteousness), and Kama (pleasure). The concept of pilgrimage tourism in the Hindu tradition is a recent one. In Nepal, where tourism has largely remained a seasonal business, pilgrimage tourism can be a perennial source of income especially because Nepal is home to some of the world's most important sacred Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage destinations. It is also noteworthy that according to 2011 official census in Nepal, more than 80 percent of the residents follow Hinduism (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012, p.4) and Nepal shares a free border with India, the country with the largest number of Hindu residents, in absolute terms, in the entire world. Barahachhetra in Nepal is as important as other pilgrimage destinations in Nepal, however, no studies have been carried out so far on*

### Keywords

*Pilgrimage,  
pilgrimage tourism,  
Barahachhetra,  
myths and legends,  
authenticity*

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### Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
kunwar.dr@gmail.com

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*the status and potential of pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra. The authenticity of the pilgrimage sites, the hospitality culture and the peace experienced by pilgrims together provide a memorable pilgrimage tourism experience for the pilgrimage tourists visiting Barahachhetra. The prospect of pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra is immense and has a direct bearing on the preservation of the religious and cultural heritages as well as the economic condition of the residents therein. A coordinated approach initiated at the highest level of governance is required to study, promote and sustain pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra. In this study both pilgrimage tourism and religious tourism interchangeably used. Though spiritual tourism has become recently evolved, the authors did not visit on it although efforts have been made to highlight its significant in the introduction.*

### **Introduction**

Pilgrimage is an age-old phenomenon for people of all religions. Pilgrimage is often been defined as a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding. Pilgrimage, commonly defined as wandering towards sacred sites as an act of will or religious obligation, has been at the core of religious tourism since ancient times (Josan, 2009; in Hung, Yang, Wassler, Wang, Lin, & Liu, 2016). Contrary to this early definition of pilgrimage as religious activity there has been a shift that researchers now began to discuss the modern ideas of pilgrimage in the context of spiritual rather than through religious motivations and actions (Collins- Kreiner, 2016). The current definition of pilgrimage entails “a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding” (Barber, 1993; in Durán-Sánchez, Álvarez-García, Río-Rama & Oliveira, 2018). State it differently, from time immemorial, pilgrimage sites worldwide have attracted large number of people, thus it is no wonder that this phenomenon has increasingly become a subject of academic inquiry (Bhardwaj, 1983; Blackwell, 2007; Coleman & Eade, 2004; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Vukonik, 1996; in Buzinde, Kalavar Kohli, Manuel-Navarrete, 2014). Scholars from various disciplines such as geography, religious studies, anthropology, and cognate disciplines have examined pilgrimage to illustrate complex connections to various cultural, social, political, economic and /or environmental dimensions of society (Dubisch & Winkleman, 2005; Moronis, 1992; Shinde, 2011; Singh, 2011; Turner & Turner, 1978; in Buzinde et al., 2014). Among many, Victor Turner (1973) was the pioneer to conduct conceptual study on pilgrims and pilgrimage using the concept of ‘liminality’ to describe the process of pilgrimage and pilgrim’s experience.

The special issue of *Annals of Tourism Research* (1992) dedicated to the topic in 1992 marked a turning point in pilgrimage research, which by that point had entered the ‘growth stage. In the introduction to this issue, Smith (1992) argued that the

contemporary terminology that identified the 'pilgrim as religious traveller and the 'tourist' as a vacationer was a culturally constructed polarity that veiled or blurred the travellers' individual motives (Smith, 1992; in Collins-Kleiner, 2016). It is Stausberg (2011; in Collins-Kreiner, 2019) who put lights on pilgrimage tourism as a new interest in pilgrimage emerged in the 2000s via scholars concerned with the field of tourism and religion.

However, on pilgrims and tourist, Smith (1992) points out, although the most widespread current use of the term "pilgrim" refers to someone on a "religious journey," the Latin *peregrinus* from which pilgrim is derived "suggest broader interpretations, including foreigner, wanderer, exile, and the traveler, as well as newcomer and stranger."

This comprehension of pilgrimage as religious to secular activity requires clear demarcation. Religious tourism can be defined as the visit of sacred places to participate or follow up religious ceremonies and the pilgrimage in the form of visits or activities to fulfil religious duties in the evaluation of tourism understanding. It mostly covers tourist trips to perform the religious beliefs and/or to see the centers of faith attractions in the evaluations of the tourism phenomenon (Heidari et al., 2017; in Heidari, Yazdani, Saghaei, & Jalilvand, 2017). Rinschede (1992; in Heidari et al., 2017) explained that travel behaviour, including travel patterns, transportation choices, seasonal demand and socialization processes are all affected by beliefs, especially in the context of religious tourism. For Wright (2007) religious tourism is a form of tourism where by people of faith travel individually or in a group for pilgrimage, missionary leisure or fellowship purposes. The destination will be a religious site. Many scholars see religious tourism as nested with in cultural tourism, because religion is understood as a part of culture (Rinschede, 1992; Santos, 2003; Singh & Sagar, 2004; in Shinde, 2007, p.187) and, in more practical terms, provides a range of resources including 'religious sites and artefacts' used in the creation of cultural tourism (Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Gettigan, 2003; in Alderman, 2002). Religious site visitors tend to travel with family members or organized groups, and their trip is highly seasonal, influenced not only by climate and weather but also by the occurrence of holidays, ceremonies and work schedules. often transform religious tourism into mass tourism, because significantly, more secular visitors are also attracted to religious tourism sites. In this case, the tourism business itself acts as a direct commercializing agent of religious heritage attractions.

Given the increase in faith travel in recent years, at a recent UNWTO Conference, definition of religious tourism was Expanded as 'a form of tourism that has its goal, a destination which is able to provide diverse religious resources for the fulfillment of religious and non religious purposes and experiences' (Shinde, 2015, para3; in Shinde, 2016, p2). Cohen's quest for a theology of tourism and recent trends of

existing pilgrimology (Singh, 2005) have become central attraction to all religious and secular groups in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Religious pilgrimage has exploited in recent years, mainly due to improved transportation facilities and the visible rise in the material prosperity of potential pilgrims. As a result of this convergence between better transport technology and greater wealth, these sacred places are becoming increasingly commoditized. Now drawing both hard core devotees, and casual pilgrim's visits with recreational activities. The thread reveals a rising pattern of geocapital formation around prominent shrines and temples, especially those situated in readily accessible places (Bhattarai, Conway, & Shrestha, 2005, p678).

Spirituality, on the other hand, is a set of ideas that one can find in religious traditions but which also exist independently of them, including an emphasis and culture of the self, wholeness, holism, and (inter) connectedness, meaning, search/quest, and experience-orientation, monotheistic, cosmology, peacefulness/tolerance, and similar positive value commitments (Heidary et al., 2018). Spiritual tourism is a more abstract, multi-faith and eclectic one in which tourists seek meaning, engagement and peace through activities such as meditation (Heidary et al., 2018). Chaline (2002; in Heidary et al., 2018) states spiritual tourism as an extraordinary experience. What is anticipated in spiritual tourism destination is not holiness or divine visions. Fedele (2012; in Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa, 2017), for example, in referring to the growing spiritual tourism traveler, coins the term 'new pilgrims' followed by 'unchurching' (Wood, 2007; in Cheer et al., 2017), 'discursive shifts' (Fedele, 2012; Kujawa, 2012; in Cheer et al., 2017), and 'subjective turns' (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; in Cheer et al., 2017). The precursor for formal recognition of spiritual tourism as a category or genre of tourism was the inaugural and so far only United Nations World Tourism Organizations (UNWTO) summit on the topic at Ninh Binh City, Vietnam in November 2013 (Cheer et al., 2017). In light of broader transformations in the way people are searching for transcendence in life, travel has become an important practice in the emerging spiritual market place. Paul Brunton, holds the mantle as one of the pioneers in the West in the quest to understand spiritualities in the East, and in embarking on the journeys, he critically explores the work of gurus, mystics and spiritual teachers among others to elucidate their wisdoms (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; in Cheer, Belhassen & Kujawa, 2017). Brunton (first published in 1934; in Cheer et al., 2017) exemplifies what Roof (2001; in Cheer et al. 2017) defines as 'reflexive spirituality' best described as a cultural movement of a contemporary attitude toward spirituality that promotes the use of reason while exploring spiritualities. The reflexive and critical examination of spiritual paths is considered one of the hallmarks of the contemporary spiritual movement, and spiritual tourism is one of its manifestations (Besecke, 2014; in Cheer et al., 2017). The study of Buzinde et al. (2014) shows that the motives encompass a need for



spiritual connectivity (devotion of self) and spiritual knowledge attainment (from *sadhus* or saints).

Pilgrimage, thus, in broader sense can be interpreted as a kinetic ritual where people engage with a landscape's imminent features and aura. Such an approach can lead to an analysis of how "mobile practices help construct apparently charged places, "the powered place", and the "role of landscape aesthetics in the 'spiritual magnetism' of pilgrimage sites"(Maddrell et al., 2015; O'Brien, 2008; Mantsinen, 2020; in Eade, 2020).

Pilgrimage is a long established form of religious mobility (Collins- Kreiner, 2010a; Jackowski & Smith,1992; Smith, 2003; in Kim Kim & King, 2016)As one of the oldest manifestations of religious expression, pilgrimage has shown the capacity to address participant spiritual needs and associated values. Pilgrimage experiences may be positive and life-changing (Digance, 2003; Smith 1992). The recent revival in popularity for pilgrimage manifests postmodern features (Courtney, 2013; Reader, 2007; in Kim et al., 2016).At the United Nations' inaugural International Congress on Tourism and Pilgrimage in Spain (UNWTO,2014; in Kim et al., 2016), speakers noted the potential contributions of pilgrimage tourism to inner fulfillment and satisfaction through psychological and physical enhancement.

Pilgrimage destinations have benefitted massively from the global expansion of the travel and tourism sector. These are not just those organized by religious institutions, such as Mecca, Varanashi, Amritsar, and Lourdes but also destinations associated with alternative cults usually categorized as "new age", "alternative" or "spiritual" (Fedele, 2013; Rountree, 2006; Ivakiv, 2001; Bowman,1993; in Eade, 2000). The intimate relationship between pilgrimage and tourism has been analyzed in terms of such hybrid categories as pilgrimage tourism, tourist pilgrimage, and religious tourism (Nolan & Nolan,1989; Eade, 1992; Vukonic,2002; Badon & Roseman, 2004; Collins-Kreiner, 2010, 2016; in Eade,2020).Four common distinctions in the types of religious sites, namely pilgrimage shrines, religious structures, festivals and purpose-built attractions, are identified in the literature (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Shakley, 2003; Shoval, 2000; in Hung et al., 2016).Whereas pilgrimage shrines primarily serve spiritual journeys, religious structures are common places of worship, and festivals are often religious gatherings. Pilgrimage shrines are also considered inherently sacred (Olsen, 2003; in Hung et al., 2016), however, purpose-built religious attractions are designed to draw visitors for tourism (Hung et al., 2016). Cohen (1992a; in Collins-Kreiner, 2016), for example, proposed distinguishing between two different types of pilgrimage centers: the formal and the popular. Formal centers are those characterized by an emphasis on serious and sublime religious activities. The rituals at centers are highly formalized, decorous and conducted in accordance with orthodox precepts. The popular are those in which folklorist activities are of greater importance, ever

taking precedence over the more serious and sublime activities. The rituals at such centers are less formalized and less decorous, and conducted in accordance with little local traditions. The pilgrims' principle motive for the pilgrimage ...is typically a personal request or the fulfillment of vow (Collins-Kreiner, 2016). As Gupta (1999, p.91) notes, a part from the distortional aspect looked at from the broader point of view, pilgrimage involved sight seen, travelling, visiting different places, in some cases, voyaging by air or sea etc. and buying the local memorabilia almost everything a tourist dose. The evolving phenomenon is viewed favorably because it brings apparent benefits to pilgrims, local communities, and society (Gupta, 1999). Thus the formulation of Turner and Turner's (1978, p20; in Olse, 2010) Classic line; "...a tourist is a half-pilgrim, if a pilgrim is a half-tourist" (Turner & Turner, 1978).

Taking into account of this fact that according to 2017 estimate about 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites every year, some 600 million national and international religious trips are made around the world, generating around US \$ 18 billion in global revenues (Ali & Cobonaglu, 2020), tourism management has been a central concern in pilgrimage tourism. Management, according to Jones et al. (2000: in Fadare 2015, p.221), is planning, organizing, leading and controlling of resources to achieve organizational goals effectively and efficiently. Resources are assets such as people, machinery, raw materials, information skills and individuals responsible for supervising the use of an organization's resources needed to achieve its goal. The associated body of literature generally deals with the production and consumption facets associated with pilgrimage. From a production perspective, researchers have focused on management and planning issues related to a wide variety of pilgrimage sites as well as the overall ambience of such locales (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). This body of literatures highlights the active involvement of multiple governance levels and the intricate inner workings necessary to manage pilgrimage sites, which are increasingly dependent on tourism infrastructure (e.g. hotels, travel agencies, tourism offices etc.) for their success (Shinde, 2010). Drawing on a consumption lens, some researchers examine the experience and characteristics of pilgrims. Earlier work on this matter focused on juxtapositions between pilgrims and tourists arguing that the two can be mapped opposite ends of a continuum on which the former occupies the sacred end while the latter is situated on the secular end (Cohen, 1991; Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Smith, 1992; Buzinde et al., 2014). The creation of typologies evident in the aforementioned line of research was generally based on classifying attendants' motivations as religious (pilgrims) or non-religious (tourists); the former was regarded as someone in search of spirituality or religious absolution while the latter was motivated by curiosity. Studies, such as the one conducted by Hudman and Jackson (1992; in Buzinde et al., 2014) indicate that pilgrimage travel often combines religious devotion and touristic pleasure.

One of the most important goal that organizations and their members try to achieve is to provide goods and services that customer desire. The extent of ability and capability of managers to manage these sites and determinant factors in the consumption and satisfaction level of the consumer in the religious sites. Stoner et al. (2001: in Fadare 2015, p.221) see planning as the process of establishing goals and suitable courses of action for achieving them; organizing involves the art of turning plans into actions; controlling ensures that actual activities conform to plan activities; while leading and motivating is the process of directing and influencing the task-related activities of group members or an entire organization (Fadare 2015, p.221)

### **Barahachhetra**

Barahachhetra is one of the four main pilgrimages in the Hindu tradition: Barahachhetra, Muktichhetra, Hariharchhetra and Kuruchhetra of which first two are in Nepal and the latter two are in India. But in Nepal, people are well acquainted with four different pilgrimage regions (or *chhetra*) which are known as Pashupatchhetra, Ruruchhetra, Barahachhetra, and Muktichhetra also called char dham (four main pilgrimage centers). Barahachhetra is a Hindu pilgrimage.

Holy places in both Nepalese and Indian culture are described as *tirtha*, a consecration of cosmic influence in the topography wherein culture, geography and spirituality interact with each other in the formation of meaning, symbolism and transcendental power within a territory altogether converges into wholeness called “sacredscapes” (cf. Singh 1995; Singh, 2013, p.123). The word “*tirtha*” refers to a ‘ford’ or river-crossing and, by extension, these are places that allow passage between the mundane and spiritual realms (Bhardwaj & Lochtefeld, 2004; in Singh & Haigh, 2015, p.783). Each Hindu pilgrimage is a ‘*tirthayatra*’ (*yatra* refers to the journey) and the geographical manifestation of each ‘*tirthayatra*’ evokes a new kind of landscape that, for the devotee, overlays sacred and symbolic meaning upon a physical and material base. Hindu pilgrims often conceive their sacred journeys as an earthly adventure that combines spiritual seeking and physical tests (Sax, 1991; in Singh & Haigh, 2015, p.783). Spaces become sacred according to historical, social, and cultural context of particular religious traditions. Places of both religion and tourism range from the predominantly tourism (Bremer, 2005, p.9260).

Sacred landscapes are understood as narratives, which are re-enacted through rituals and processions (Yaeger & López, 2018, p.1). The sacred landscape combines the absoluteness of space, relativeness of places and comprehensiveness of landscape; thus altogether result to a ‘wholeness’ carrying the inherent and imposed spirit of ‘holiness’, which is to be called ‘sacredscapes’ or *divyakshetra* (Singh & Rana, 2017, p.1). Shinde (2010) expresses a sacred landscape is associated with the presence of divinity, which is made accessible through religious symbols and rituals such as

pilgrimage. Campo (1998; in Alderman, 2002) used the term pilgrimage landscape, to stress the relationships between people and place. No place is intrinsically sacred. Pilgrimage, and their attendant landscapes, are social construction a perspective that recognizes the role played by “humans in their creation, appropriation, organization, and representation (Campp, 1998, p.42; in Alderman, 2002). According to Shinde (2010), pilgrimage landscape may have elements of natural beauty, connecting these elements with legend stories, meanings and rituals that heighten their aesthetic value (p.103). David Kinsley (1998), as cited by Shinde (2010), rightly observes that “[w]here we might see simply rivers, hills, pond, and forest, the pilgrim sees a landscape charged with divinity, a land that was actually saved by mythic events”.

There are altogether 51 *Shakti(s)* of which 41 are in India and the rest in the nearby countries (Singh, 2013, p.121). One of these Shaktipithas is the Dantakali Temple which is also located in Barahachhetra. Different ancient scriptures such as the *Bhagavat*, *Skandapurana*, and *Barahapurana* provide legends about Barahachhetra. The most popular story is that in the ancient times, Lord *Narayana* (or Lord *Vishnu*), reincarnating as *Yagnabaraha*, rescued the earth from the demon named *Hiranyaksha* who had drowned the Earth inside the ocean, and the Lord's rage did not subside until his body touched the *Kokah-Kaushiki* (name of two sacred rivers) confluence. This pleased the Lord and he started residing in the confluence of the *Kokah* and *Kaushiki* that day onwards as per the request of *Kokah* (Devacharya, 2019, p.4).

Lord Baraha is considered the third of nine incarnations of Lord *Vishnu* in the Hindu mythology. The word 'Barahachhetra' is made up of two words, Baraha and Kshetra. *Baraha Avatar* refers to the *Baraha* (boar) incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Likewise, *akshetra* (or chhetra) may denote a place where there is a temple (circuit areas) or where there is held to have been a person or event of sacred, religious or dharmic importance (Singh, 2005, p.217). Thus, literally, Barahachhetra translates as 'the area of Lord Baraha'. For this reason, pilgrimage to Barahachhetra is considered especially important to the *Vaishnavites* (followers of Lord Vishnu). The Himwatkhandha of *Skandapurana* has mentioned the area of the Baraha hill as 1 *Yojan* (= 4 *Kosh*, 1 *Kosh*= 1.8 km) and the area within a radius of 3 *Yojan* (=12 *Kosh*) from the Baraha hill as *Mokshadayak* (having the ability to grant liberation). Likewise, chapter 140 of the *Barahapurana*, has mentioned the area of Barahachhetra within the radius of 5 *Yojan* (=20 *Kosh*, 1 *Kosh*= 1.8 km) with the Lord Baraha Temple as the center (Khativada, 2009:114-115).

The sacred landscape of Barahachhetra comprises of the different temples, sacred rivers, sacred spaces, Sanskrit schools, religious sects, daily rituals, festivals and religious fairs. According to Himwatkhandha of *Skandapurana* (Ch. 17-33; in Devacharya, 2019, p.4), those who visit Barahachhetra are relieved of all of their sins. Likewise, chapter 140 of the *Barahapurana* states that the merit gained by fasting,

bath and other religious activities in these pilgrimages results in ascension to the Vishnuloka (Khativada, 2009, p.157-158).

The pilgrimage system in Barahachhetra is comprised of both the sacred and the secular landscape. The secular landscape of Barahachhetra includes its physical setting and other natural attractions. The non-religious natural attractions in Barahachhetra include: the KoshiTappu Wildlife Reserve, motorboat adventure, from Chatara to the Lord Baraha Temple and onwards to Dhankuta, rafting from Dolalghat, Kavrepalanchowk district to Chatara and so on. Barahachhetra lies in eastern Nepal at a distance of approximately 470-600 kms. from the capital city Kathmandu of Nepal. However, flights from Kathmandu to Biratnagar are also available from where pilgrims can get connected to the road trip. The distance from Itahari in the Mahendra Highway to the main Lord Baraha Temple is 42 km. There is moterable road from Jhumka to the main Baraha temple. Chattara is considered as the entry point to Baraha temple distanced with 8 km. Some pilgrims will also go to Barahachhetra from Dharan. The pilgrimage site is located in altitudes ranging from 185 m. to above 1600 m. above the sea level. The weather in Barahachhetra Municipality is mostly hot. The main pilgrimage site lies in the hill which is close proximity to Koshi river. Plenty of tea shops, restaurants, souvenir shops, individual religious offering mobile shops are located in Barahachhetra. The site includes car parking, secular buildings, main entranc gate, nine religious temples, *Dharmashala(s)* (religious rest houses) and *Ashrams*. It is the shelter where spiritual and yogic disciplines are pursued. It also caters food and accommodation for the pilgrims. Barahachhetra is inhabited by mixed ethnic/caste groups.

Present day important pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra include: 1. Lord Baraha Temple, 2. *Kokah-Kaushiki* confluence, 3. Suryakunda, 4. Bhawanithan Temple, 5. Lattenithan Temple, 6. Dantakali Temple, 7. Vishnupaduka, 8. Ramdhuni, 9. Bhim Sheela, 10. Gomukha Tirtha, 11. Kubjambra Tirtha, 12. Yammavyasan Tirtha, 13. Matanga Tirtha, 14. Bajravawa Tirtha, 15. Guptabaraha, 16. Shringighat, 17. Devighat, 18. Brahmakunda, 19. Chakrakunda, 20. Shri ChhinnamastaBhagawati. 21. Auliya Gaddi Math, 22. Maina Maini, 23. Mahankali Temple, 24. ChhintangBhagawati Temple, 25. Pindeshwor, 26. Budhasubba, 28. Auliya Gaddi Math, 29. Aadibaraha. It is believed that the present appearance of original temple of Barahachhetra was rebuilt by Juddha Shumsher in 1991 (1934 AD) after the temple was demolished by the earthquake of 1933. The importance of this sacred site has been mentioned in Brahma Purana, Varaha Purana, Skanda Purana and even glorified in the Mahabharat epic.

Pilgrims visit Barahachhetra all the year round, however, the months of *Shrawan* (Jul-Aug) and *Kartik* (Oct-Nov) sees the highest influx of pilgrims. An exclusive list of different festivals, fairs and occasions celebrated in Barahachhetra include: The *Kartik Mela* (October-November), *Poush Aunshi* (December-January), *Sorah*

*Shraddha* (September) (16 days for *Shraddha* rituals), *Makar Sankranti* (January-February), *Bala Chaturdashi*, *Shrawan* (July-August), *Bol Bam* (the prayer of Lord Shiva), *Sri Krishna Janmasthami* (Lord Krishnas Birthday ceremony), *Falgun Purnima* (the holy festival observed in February-March), *Navaratri-Vijaya Dashami* (tenth day of Durga Puja observed in October-November), *Buddha Purnima* (full moon of Baishak-April-May), *Chaitra-Ramnavami* (March-April), *Laxmipuja* (worship to the Goddess of Wealth in November), *Mahashivaratri* (worship to Lord Shiva in February-March), and *Harisayani Ekadashi* (the eleventh day of each lunar fortnight, totaling twenty-four times throughout the year). *Ekadashi* is observed as an auspicious holy day of religious fasting specially by those thousands who look upon Lord Vishnu, rather than Shiva or Buddha as the Supreme God (Anderson, 1977, p.175).

The purpose of visiting Barahachhetra mainly with the goal of getting religious merits. The carry out *Shraddha* (post-death rituals) and other religious rituals such as such as *Homa*, *Yajna* (religious sacrifice), *Bratabandha* (sacred thread wearing ceremony), *Bibaha* (marriage), *Rudripath* and *Purana* (worship and recitation of Hindu sacred texts), and participate in the different religious fairs organized in the different pilgrimage sites. Furthermore, the importance of pilgrimage in Barahachhetra can also be linked to the more recent *Kumbha* tradition in Chatara, Barahachhetra. On another note, the area of Barahachhetra also overlaps with another important sacred area known as the *Rudraksharanya Kshetra* or the abode of Lord Shiva. The area of *Rudraksharanya Kshetra* extends 80 miles east of the *Kaushiki* River, and has north-south length of 80 miles (Acharya, 1999, p.69).

Considering the fact of what has been discussed above about the religious trips around the world that 2017 estimate generating around US \$ 18 billion in global revenues (Ali & Cobonaglu, 2020) as one of the most prominent pilgrimage regions in Nepal, Barahachhetra can contribute in generating significant amount of revenue from pilgrimage tourism. Thus, the objectives of this research are to assess Barahachhetra as a pilgrimage tourism destination and to study the sacred landscape of Barahachhetra. The study is of significance for students and researchers of tourism, particularly those interested in pilgrimage tourism, to general readers and policymakers on the subject. The lay out of this paper includes introduction, methodology, review of literature, findings and discussion, and conclusion.

### **Review of literature**

Pilgrimage as a social phenomenon has been the focus of studies by numerous academic disciplines, including History, sociology, geography, anthropology, and psychology. Pilgrimage of various types have been an important part of most religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism (Tanka, 1981:240-257; in Hudman, 1992, p.107). Scholars have approached the study of pilgrimage



travel from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. These have included anthropology (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Cohen, 1992; Graburn, 1983; Turner & Turner, 1978; in Kim et al., 2016), geography (Collins-Kreiner, 2010b; Kollins-Kreiner & Wall, 2015; in Kim et al., 2016), sociology (Cohen, 1979; MacCannell, 1976), and religious studies (Gesler, 1996; Reader, 2007; Vilaca, 2010). Much of the attention evident in the tourism literature has evolved identifying the dichotomy between sacred and secular pilgrim motivations (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006; Damari & Mansfeld, 2014; Devereux & Carnegie, 2006; Hudman & Jackson, 1992; Vukonic, 1992; in Kim et al., 2016). Commercialization and commodification are concepts that have mostly emerged through post-modern ideas, such as sceptical views on power relations, nostalgia, and perceived loss of authenticity (Bailey, 2008; Cole, 2007; Goulding, 2000; in Hung, Yang, Wassler, Wang, Lin, & Liu, 2016). Commodification is typically defined as tourism that transforms a culture or heritage into a commercialized product, which is packaged and sold to tourists for their consumption (Cole, 2007; in Hung et al., 2016). Similarly, commercialization involves rendering tourist sites available for profitable purposes (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; in Hung et al., 2016). Both concepts are believed to diminish authenticity (Taylor, 2001; in Hung et al., 2016) and to ultimately reduce the value of tourism product (Go, 1997; Swain, 1989; in Hung et al., 2016). Contrary to this, the commercialization of tourism sites also generated economic opportunities, part for local businesses (Mason, 2004; in Hung et al., 2016).

Among these various discipline social anthropologists are pioneers to the study of pilgrimage by focusing on its connection to various social dimensions and as a vehicle through which to understand complex societies and civilisations (Vidhyarthi, 1961, 1979). In the earlier anthropological studies of pilgrimage in Sri Lanka Pfaffenberger (1979) and other scholars (see de Silva, 2016) are based on functionalist approach (de Silva, 2016). However, more recent studies put their theoretical arguments against a 'universalistic' perspective emphasise the importance of considering multiple historical representations of Buddhist pilgrimage centres in Sri Lanka, rather than studying them as a unified tradition. The most sustained response so far to Turner's model has been provided by Eade and Sallnow in their important edited volume *Contesting The Sacred* (1991; in de Selva, 2016). They not only challenge the anti-structure hypothesis but also posit a new general approach (post-modern) to the anthropological study of pilgrimage. Nevertheless, Victor Turner's (1973; in Buzinde et al., 2014) work is perhaps the most recognized contribution to pilgrimage studies that draws on an anthropological understanding of the phenomenon. Turner is credited with devising a universal theory that is broadly centered on the idea that pilgrimage is a process of moving from the familiar to the anti-structural 'other's and back, and the period of being away from structure (the liminal or luminous period) is characterised by the existence of a communists quality of relationship



among participants. The former creates the situation in which the latter can flourish (Morinis, 1992, p.257; in Bizande, 2014).

Since the early 1990s researchers have shown increasing interest in the emergence of religion- induced travel (Kim, Kim, & King, 2019). Kim et al.'s. (2019) analysis of 84 studies generated four main themes. These include how religious tourism evolved from pilgrimage, the perceptions of religious tourists, religious tourism destinations, and religious tourism infrastructure (Kim et al., 2019, p.4). The literature review shows that 46 research were conducted in the Asia-Pacific region, 26 were undertaken in Europe, three in America and six in Africa. The most popularly researched countries were: India, Israel, and UK followed by China, Spain, Greece, and Malaysia. The literature review reveals that the most frequently researched creed was Islam followed by other creeds and demonstrations: Buddhism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Christianity, Orthodox, Anglican, Zionism, Taonism, Judaism, Mormonism, and Secularism, and United African Apostolic Church (Kim et al., 2019).

It is Vidyarthi (1961) who first proposed the model of the 'sacred complex' in his study of pilgrimage in Gaya, India. Vidyarthi's descriptive framework theory is an extension and formulation of planning theories which has been followed by Jha (1971) and Vidyarthi, Saraswati and Jha (1979). In their studies they theoretically and methodologically developed 'The Sacred Complex (a sacred geography', 'sacred performances', and 'sacred specialists) as one of the most important tools for understanding Hindu civilization. These studies enhanced to the several Indian scholars to conduct research in different pilgrimages under the heading of pilgrimage tourism. Authors such as Shinde (2010) and Sinha (2014) have also conducted case studies on pilgrimage tourism destinations using the concept of 'sacred landscape'.

In the context of Nepal, scholars like Jha (1971), Messerschmidt (1989) and Pandey (2000) have carried out studies on pilgrimage only. In 'The Sacred Complex in Janakpur: Indological, Sociological, Anthropological, and Philosophical Study of Hindu Civilization, Jha (1971) analyzes the sacred complex of Janakpur from a Hindu civilizational perspective using the concepts formerly applied by Vidyarthi (1961) and he too concludes that the sacred complex of Janakpur is tradition-oriented and that 'the boundary of a nation is not the boundary of a civilization' (1971, p.105). The two papers by Messerschmidt (1989) on Hindu pilgrimage to Muktinath, Nepal, provide an anthropological study of the cultural aspects of the Muktinath geography, and sociological dimensions of the Hindu pilgrimage to Muktinath, respectively. The first paper highlights Muktinath as a sacred field perceived in their own ways by the Hindu and the Buddhists and identifies and elaborates some outstanding attributes of the religious and geographic field of Muktinath (Messerschmidt, 1989, p. 94) while the second paper examines the sociological aspects of Hindu pilgrimage in Muktinath from a perspective beyond 'communitas', 'liminality', 'structure' and 'anti-structure'

highlighting that pilgrimage to Muktinath is a sacred journey (Messerschmidt, 1989, p.116). Concurring with the findings of Vidyarthi (1961) and Jha (1971), the author also affirms that Hindu pilgrimage may be viewed as an enhanced or encapsulated image of Brahmanical society in which structure-affirming behavior is expected (Messerschmidt, 1989, p.117). Pandey's (2000) book 'Sacred Complex of Ruruksetra: A Holy Tirtha of Hinduism in Western Nepal' uses the trio concepts of 'sacred geography', 'sacred performances', and 'sacred specialists'. The significant aspect of this book is that unlike Vidyarthi (1961) and Jha (1971), the author has dedicated a full chapter on cultural tourism that also incorporates eco-tourism, trekking tourism and rafting tourism.

Various authors have carried out general introductory works incorporating limited information about different pilgrimage sites. For instance, 'Tirthparyatan' by Gautam (2014) includes a theoretical treatise on pilgrimage and provides a narrative introduction to different pilgrimages in three countries, including 137 pilgrimage sites in Nepal. The author puts a great emphasis on promoting domestic pilgrimage but there is little or no focus on international pilgrimage tourism. Likewise, theoretical treatise on pilgrimage tourism by Kunwar (2017) in his academic work 'Tourists and Tourism' is brief but does not entail any case studies of pilgrimage tourism in Nepal.

Turning to the works on pilgrimage tourism in Nepal very few academic works have been accomplished and they are recent. Examples include works on the Manakamana Temple in Gorkha by Bleie (2003), Lumbini by Nyaupane (2009) and Kunwar and Ghimire (2012). Tone Bleie (2003), in his study, expresses that there is a need to balance promotion of pilgrimage tourism with developmental and commercial interests. In their article, Kunwar and Ghimire (2012), argue that Lumbini as an International Pilgrimage destination is authentic both in terms of visitor experience (activity-related authenticity) and the toured objects (object-related authenticity).

Finally, coming back to the works on pilgrimage in Barahachhetra, various works have been concluded by Acharya (1999), Khativada (2009), Bajracharya (n.d.), Bhattarai (2018), Barahachhetra (2016), Ghimire (2019), Devacharya (2019), and others. Moreover, various important pilgrimage destinations in Barahachhetra such as the Budhasubba Temple, Dantakali Temple and Pindeshwor Temple which are indispensable in the identity of Barahachhetra as a pilgrimage region, have been excluded. Man Bajracharya's work "Shri Barahachhetra 'Avilekh: Bhagawan Shri Baraha Vishnu Ra Auliyababa Nishan" outlines the different mythical dimensions of many pilgrimage sites within Barahachhetra and few details on local development of the sites. The author uses both verses from Sanskrit as well as their Nepalese interpretation which makes the work basically a religious treatise rather than an empirical study of pilgrimage tourism. In his book 'Dharan-Dham-Sangraha', Bhattarai (2018) presents the importance of Pindeshwor, Dantakali, Panchakanya and

Budhasubba along with their myths and legends, and the origin, types, importance and various usage of *Rudraksha*. The book is important because it details the deep religious meanings of the described temples and attempts to induce people into visiting these places. Moreover, its contents are offered in three different languages: Nepali, Hindi and English, which makes it accessible to both domestic and international audience in these three languages. Whereas these works shed light on Barahachhetra from a pilgrimage, cultural or religious point of view, not a single academic work has been conducted in Barahachhetra exclusively from a pilgrimage tourism perspective which highlights the importance of this Hindu pilgrimage destination. Therefore, it was necessary to conduct this research on Barahachhetra from a pilgrimage tourism perspective.

### Methodology

No previous studies have been conducted in Barahachhetra from a pilgrimage tourism perspective. Therefore, an exploratory research has been carried out. Phenomenology as methodological approach has been used to present original views, perspectives and experiences of the respondents: both the hosts (service providers) and the beneficiaries (the pilgrims). Phenomenology is an epistemological endeavor and calls for an analysis of 'the things themselves' (Eberle, 2014, p.184, 198). In this study phenomenology thematizes the phenomenon of consciousness, and, in its most comprehensiveness sense, it refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to the single person. However, within phenomenology, consciousness enjoys a privileged status because it cannot be avoided (Giorgi, 1997, p.236). In this study, the authors have followed larger hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach opens up a multitude of data sources such as interviews, biographies, autobiographies, and video or in fact any source that might help explicate the experience in questions. The phenomenological perspective aims to return to the experience as lived and provide a detailed description of a phenomenon based on the structure and meaning of an experience (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 1997; in Brymer, 2010). Although Barahachhetra entails a broad region, this study delimits to eleven pilgrimage sites located within Sunsari district. Moreover, the focus is on the Lord Baraha Temple site including the case study of the *Kartik Mela* (religious fair) organized therein. Primary emic perspectives were used to generate authentic findings. Though this site was visited by the first author earlier before and post-pandemics, the second author of this article conducted fieldwork in Barahachhetra for his master's thesis. A total number of 24 days were spent in the research site in two phases: from 24 September to 04 October, 2019 in the first phase, and from 01 November to 13 November, 2019 in the second phase. The total number of respondents in this study was 274 and they were chosen primarily based on the non-probability purposive sampling. Respondents included pilgrims,

priests, religious leaders, religious seekers, hoteliers, shopkeepers, journalists, social workers, intellectuals, locals and other various service providers. Qualitative analysis of primary data collected through audio records, video records, direct observation, field notes, inference notes and pictures were done using the tools of coding, sorting, imagery, semiotics, themes, dominant themes, categorization, and triangulation. Many follow up calls were made to the respondents during the data analysis phase in order to obtain additional or new information from research participants.

## Findings & discussion

### Importance of Barahachhetra

Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrimage tourists visit Barahachhetra to pay respect to their deities, to participate in religious fairs, and to conduct various religious rituals. Barahachhetra is not the name of a single pilgrimage site or a Temple. Rather, it comprises of an indefinite (in the sense that not all sacred elements have been identified, conserved or studied) cluster of Temples, sacred spaces, water bodies, objects, and idols amongst others. According to a pilgrim:

*“Every spot where you set your foot, every stone that you turn and every waterspot you encounter in Barahachhetra is sacred. Many smaller sacred spots described in the scriptures are yet to be properly identified, recognized and protected.”*

An elderly priest and astrologer from India attending the *Kartik Mela* in the Lord Baraha Temple outlined the importance of bathing in the confluence of *Kaushiki* and *Kokah* in the following words:

*“This is my 25<sup>th</sup> visit to the temple. Bathing in the confluence of the Kokah and Kaushiki Rivers grants fertility to men and women. I have advised many infertile men and women in India to take a holy bath in Kokah-Kaushiki and those who have done that have borne children.”*

A pilgrim provided the following testimony on the uniqueness of the Vishnupaduka Temple:

*“I’ve heard that pilgrims from Nepal who go to visit Gaya, Kashi are asked if they have already performed Shraddha in Vishnupaduka as that is the first place for Shraddha to be done. Conducting Shraddha (ancestral rite) of ancestors will free them. Shraddha in Vishnupaduka can be done even by people who do not know the Tithi (date and time) of death of their deceased family members.”*

Indeed, it is believed that Lord Vishnu, along with his wife Laxmi, had carried out *Shraddha* rites in Vishnupaduka (Varahapurana, Chapter 140; in Acharya, 1990, p.35). As per the Brahma Purana

*By worshipping Vishnu, one achieves one enjoys material enjoyment in this world and Mukti (freedom) in the other world. By drinking the water of Kokah,*

*great sins are destroyed, one achieves religious merit. One achieves heaven by fasting in Kokah Tirtha. Giving donations to Brahmins, saints, poor, and those worthy of receiving donations in Kakahtirth leads to achievement of unceasing merit and destruction of the life-death cycle. In Magh Krishna Pakshya, one should go to the origin of Kokah (Vishnupaduka) for pilgrimage for 5 days and carry out Shraddha rituals. Whoever does Shraddha of their ancestors, without doubt, will achieve above-mentioned merits. (Brahmapuran, Chapter 110; in Acharya, 1990, p.32).*

The region of Barahachhetra has been a religious area since a long time and both domestic and international pilgrims have visited the pilgrimages in Barahachhetra for decades. An intellectual from the Lord Baraha Temple area familiar with the major temples in Barahachhetra made the following statement:

*"Foreign pilgrims mostly comprise of Indians but you can see Hindu pilgrims from other countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand and, sometimes, even Maldives. Occasionally, even white-skinned Hindu foreigners can be sighted."*

Barahachhetra not only attracts to the Hindu pilgrims but also it attracts to the heterogeneous mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, Kirat, Hindu-Buddhist, Hindu-Kirat, Bonpo, Muslim, and Kabir followers as evidenced by this research. More than half of the pilgrims interviewed during the research said they had visited at least one pilgrimage site in Barahachhetra in the past. Many pilgrim groups come to Barahachhetra with the plan of visiting multiple pilgrimage sites near and far.

The leader of a group of 40 Indian pilgrims from Matigara, Siliguri, India said:

*"We visited Dantakali Temple on our way here. We will stay awake throughout the night singing Bhajans (devotional songs) and eat after 10 am tomorrow morning after visiting the temple. Tomorrow we will go to Ramdhuni first and then onwards to Pashupatinath in Kathmandu. On our return, we will also go to Manokamana and Janakpur."* All these statements reveal that Barahachhetra is one of the important sites of Nepal.

The National Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025 claims that almost 15% (by air) of arrivals from India, 60% of arrivals from Sri-Lanka and 45% of arrivals from Thailand visit Nepal for religious purpose (Baral & Bhandari, 2016, p.11). There is no official data on the number of pilgrims visiting the pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra. The priest of the Lord Baraha Temple priest estimates that approximately 5-6 hundred thousand pilgrims visit the temple annually. However, the pilgrims' turnover depends much on the religious occasions. For instance, approximately 4 hundred thousand pilgrims visit the Pindeshwor Temple during the Bol Bam Mela in Shrawan, and an estimated one hundred thousands visit the Ramdhuni on the day of *Balachaturdashi* (Hindu

festival that falls on the 14th day of waning phase of the moon in the Hindu lunar month of Kartik/Mangsir- Nov-Dec), and 2- 2.5 hundred thousands pilgrims visit the Vishnupaduka Temple during the occasion of *Poukhe Aunshi* (Hindu festival/ occasion falling on the new moon day before the first day of the lunar fortnight in the Hindu lunar month of Poush (Dec-Jan) when people conduct *Shraddha* rituals for the freedom of their ancestors). The most significant change that Barahachhetra witnessed more recently is the commencement of the famous *Kumbha Mela* in 2002 that has brought Barahachhetra into limelight like never before. A responsible member of the Jagatguru Peeth Pracheen Haridwar Chataradham estimated: that approximately 1.5 crore (=15 million) pilgrims participated in the third *Kumbha Mela* organized in Chatara in 2014. However, not all temples receive the same number of pilgrims.

Some of the common practices, which are practiced by the pilgrims at almost every important *tirthas* (pilgrimages) are holy bath, vows, prayer, gift and charity, *pinda dan* (offer of rice-balls in the name of past ancestors of both paternal and maternal sides), *tarpan* (offer of water to the past ancestor, gods, and rishis) etc. The gods and goddess of a *tirtha* are to be propitiated by chanting their names, by remembering their sanctity, by cultivating devotion and by performing *puja* (worship) and *arti* (burning lamp) to them (Jha, 1985, p.14-15). The pilgrims visiting Barahachhetra were observed engaged abundantly in *pinda dan*, *tarpan*, holy bath, vows, prayers, and *Shraddharituals*.

### **Myths and legends of Barahachhetra**

Myths and legends of Barahachhetra are one of the main components of the sacred landscape of Barahachhetra. For instance, although the ancient legend of Vishnupaduka relates to Lord Vishnu's footsteps and performance of *Shraddha* of his ancestors, in more recent times, the Vishnupaduka temple was found in 1913 AD by a shaman of 'Tamang' ethnic group. The temple priest narrated:

*"At a point in time, the villagers in Vishnupaduka faced hard time and often fell ill when Laxman Tamag, the village Shaman, went into trance and informed that Lord Vishnu's steps were buried in the place and if they were dug out and worshipped, there would be peace in the village."*

While the myths and legends can be traced back to the Hindu *Puranic* scriptures, some of them are more recent. The recent ones, for example include the story of two *Siddhas*: the Auliya Baba and Baba Banakhandi both of whom were contemporaries and lived approximately 400 years ago. A local teacher from Chatara shared:

*"Auliya Baba is believed to have got his name due to his miraculous power to attract and absorb parasites of Malaria from his patients, which he would bind in a handkerchief. On the other hand, Baba Banakhandi had the ability to turn*



*anything into the thing he desired using his tongs. He could plant mango in a Sakhuwa tree (Shorearobusta)."*

It is evident from the interviews with pilgrims that myths and legends related of different pilgrimage sites and temples in Barahachhetra attracts and mystifies many and transports them into the realm of imagination and reverence. The recently constructed *BarahaKundain* the Lord Baraha Temple area is one example of man-made symbolic representation of the related legend of Lord Baraha that leaves the pilgrims wondering.

### **The Kumbha tradition**

The term *Kumbha Mela* comes from the Sanskrit word 'Kumbha' meaning 'urn' and 'Mela' meaning 'fair' or 'gathering' (Verma & Sarangi, 2019). Participating in *Kumbha* helps to get rid of draught and excessive rain, makes the earth full of production and wealth, enables people to get right direction from saints, sages and religious leaders, enables one to garner religious merit and so forth (Khativada, 2009, p.391). According to ancient Hindu scriptures, in the course of the *Samudra Manthan* (churning of the Ocean), four drops of the nectar fell on four places of India: Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik and Prayagraj where the *Kumbha Mela* is organized every twelve years (Devacharya, 2009, p.42). The fair is held at above mentioned four different places in a cyclic manner after every three years (Mallinson, 2015; in Verma & Sarangi, 2019). The *Kumbha* tradition started in Nepal from 2002.

A local intellectual from Chatara said the following:

*'The credit of systematically collecting and putting forth the proofs of the religious importance of Barahachhetra and Kumbha Mela among the intellectuals and public in Nepal goes to Shri Shri 1008 Balsanta Mohansharan Devacharya Maharaj. With his initiative, altogether two Purna (full) Kumbha and two Ardha (half) Kumbha have been organized so far'.*

The four *Kumbha* events were organized in the following dates:

1. 14 April 2002- 15 May 2002 (First *Purna Kumbha*)
2. 20 March 2007- 19 Apr 2007 (First *Ardha Kumbha*)
3. 31 March 2014- 2 May 2014 (Second *Purna Kumbha*)
4. 6 April 2019- 7 May 2019 (Second *Ardha Kumbha*)

It is obvious that the *Kumbh Mela* in Nepal hold far more religious significance. The organization of *Kumbha Mela* in Nepal is not only a means of gaining religious merit but also a significant step towards promotion of other authentic pilgrimage sites in Nepal.



### The tradition of priests

In most cases, each of the prominent temples in Barahachhetra have a tradition of priest from a particular lineage. The priest of the Dantakali Temple mentioned:

*'Khanals (Brahmins) were the first priest of the Dantakali Temple since the rule of the Sen Kings, and, in 1968, during the rule of King Girwanyudhha Bikram Shah of the Shah dynasty, this was acknowledged in a Tamrapatra (Copper plate record) authorizing Khanal families to continue this tradition. Today, we take turns among 8 Khanal families to work as priest of the temple for one year.'*

Likewise, the priest of the Lord Baraha temple is related to the *Bhandari* family and the priest of the Vishnupaduka Temple belongs to the ethnic Tamang tradition. Furthermore, the current priests of the Panchakanya Temple in Dharan is the fourth in his generation of *Bajracharya* priests, and the priest of the Budhasubba Temple is the fifteenth in his generation of ethnic Magar.

### Healers and Aghori

Generally the pilgrimage region will be visited by many healers and *aghoris* (the ascetics of Shaiva sect). One such healer providing services in Chatara briefed about her service as follows:

*"Mostly people with madness, paralysis, sudden loss of voice, and possessed by spirits visit me. I treat them as per the guidance I receive from "Bhagawati" (a word used to denote a female deity or Goddess) and they get cured. I usually provide these services during evenings."*

A local intellectual from the Lord Baraha Temple area mentioned about the work of an Aghori (a *Sadhu* from a particular ascetic Shaiva sect) called 'Tyaginath Nepali Baba' who visited the Lord Baraha Temple for decades until 2013 during the *Kartik Mela* (October-November fair):

*"During his visits, Tyaginath Nepali Baba provided the locals with very effective medical treatment. For example, he treated my son for very high fever in a day and, once, miraculously healed an elderly woman who was on the deathbed. She lived for 13 more years after that."* This Aghori, also known as Yogiraj Dr. Tyaginath Aghori, passed away at the age of 126 in March, 2020.

### Religious sects, *Sadhus* and other service providers

Some of the main religious sects and organizations existing in Barahachhetra are:

- Jagatguru Peeth Pracheen Haridwar Chataradham, Chatara
- Jagatguru Shree Ramanandacharya Sewa Peeth, Chatara

- Aadhya Jagatguru Shree Shankaracharya Peeth, Chatara
- Shree Bhubaraha Ramanuj Peeth, Chatara
- Advait Sanstha Samrakshyan Manch, Chatara
- Geeta Brahma Chintan Yogashram, Chatara
- Shree Panchadusnaam Samyukta Juna Akhada, Lord Baraha Temple area
- Baba Banakhandi Udaseen Ashram, Ramdhuni

The presence of these religious sects and organizations plays an important role in keeping alive the religious and spiritual atmosphere in Barahachhetra. They on the one hand provide guidance and an abode to the religious seekers while on the other hand, they help in the promotion of Barahachhetra as a pilgrimage tourism region. Examples include: the initiative of Shri Shri 1008 Balsanta Mohansharan Devacharya Maharaj to begin the tradition of the *Kumbh Mela* in Barahachhetra, the organizing of the *Shree Ram Tarak Brahma Maha Yajna* (claimed to have been organized for the first time after 705 years) organized by the *Jagatguru Shree Ramanandacharya Sewa Peeth* from 10 Feb 2019 to 19 February 2019. Likewise, the *Naga Sadhu(s)* belonging to the Shree Panchadusnaam Samyukta Juna Akhada in the Lord Baraha Temple area fulfill an important role in carrying out the *Auliya Baba Nishan* ceremony in the Lord Baraha Temple during the *Kartik Mela*. Volunteers belonging to these sects and organizations also present themselves during the different important religious occasions to serve the pilgrims. Several other *Sadhu(s)* and spiritual groups can be seen providing their services to pilgrims in the temple premises. There are other spontaneous volunteer organizations or people who serve free food to the pilgrims during large religious fairs and events and consider it their way of serving the Lord.

### **Sanskrit education centers**

There are two main Sanskrit study centers in Barahachhetra. The first one is *Pindeshwor Vidhyapeeth* (Campus), located in Pindeshwor, Dharan Sub Metropolitan City, ward no. 14 and the next one is *Shri Radhakrishna Sanskrit Ved Vidhyashram Gurukulam Madhyamik Vidhyalaya* located in Chatara, Barahachhetra Municipality, ward no. 1. These two institutions can be a good destination for pilgrim tourists interested in Sanskrit studies. While the students, graduates and priests from these Sanskrit schools usually provide religious services to the temples and pilgrims in Barahachhetra, they also immediately make up for any scarcity of priests during any occasions or events.

A group of student priests from the *Gurukulam* in Chatara who arrived in the Lord Baraha Temple area during the *Kartik Mela* informed:

*“Our teacher decides on whose turn it is in a particular day. We take whatever the pilgrims or ritual organizers give us. We heard that today the ritual organizer is giving us NRs. 1500 each. High pilgrim presence in Baraha temple brings more opportunities to practice our knowledge and to earn too.”*

### **Religious discipline of pilgrims**

The pilgrimage rules mainly lay emphasis on fasting, sexual abstinence, rejection of soft bed and aid of vehicle making journey and walking without shoes *tirtha-yatra* (Jha, 1985, p.14). Some of the common practices, which are practiced by the pilgrims at almost every important *tirtha(s)* are holy bath, vows, prayer, gift and charity, *pinda dan* (offering of rice-balls in the name of ancestors of both paternal and maternal sides), *tarpan* (offering of water to the ancestors, gods, and rishis) etc. The gods and goddess of a *tirtha* are to be propitiated by chanting their names, by remembering their sanctity, by cultivating devotion and by performing *puja* (worship) and *arti* (burning lamp) to them (Jha, 1985, pp14-15).

Pilgrims coming to Barahachhetra are well aware of the religious austerities to be followed before and during the Temple visits. The group leader of a *Bengali* pilgrims from India noted:

*“We observe fasting, some even without drinking water, on the day of Ekadashi. After sunset, we carry out the Ekadashi Pooja and, thereafter, stay awake the entire night singing praises and hymns to the Lord. The next day, we will eat only after completing the Darshan of the temple at the auspicious time pre-determined by our priest.”*

As a sign of austerity and devotion many pilgrims visit the temples on foot. For instance, many pilgrims travel on foot from Chatara to the Lord Baraha Temple during the *Kartik Mela*. This also holds true for pilgrims visiting other temples, particularly for the Pindeshwor Temple, during the *Bol-Bam* (dedicated to the Lord Shiva) fair in the month of *Shrawan* (July-August). Moreover, *Bol-Bam* refers to pilgrimages and festivals in India and Nepal glorifying Shiva. The festival runs in the month of *Shrawan*. A devotee takes a holy dip in the sacred river. Most pilgrims observe a fast on Monday during the month.

### **Donations**

Donations comprise an integral part of Hindu pilgrimage. Usually, during temple visits, pilgrims offer donations either to the priest or in the donation box placed in the temple area. However, in the case of Barahachhetra, during special occasions and big fairs, the temple management committees make announcements to induce pilgrims to donate. During the *Kartik Mela*, it was evident that *Barahachhetra Samrakshan Manch* members appealing pilgrims to donate money for gaining religious merit.

These announcements highlighted how the outlook of the Lord Baraha Temple area had transformed due to the construction activities in the temple area.

### **Pilgrims' motivation and experiences**

From this study, it was found that pilgrims visit Barahachhetra with different motivations, both material and spiritual, but return with largely similar experiences. Following are some of the statements made by pilgrims on why they visit Barahachhetra.

*"Eight years ago, when my son was very sick, I came and prayed for his good recovery in Dantakali, and he recovered. Thereafter, I often come to Dantakali with my family."* (A female pilgrim visiting Dantakali)

*"I come here each year to fly pigeons. This brings peace in my heart and my faith binds me in morality."* (A domestic pilgrim visiting the Lord Baraha Temple)

*"In our Rajbanshi community, we have a belief that if one offers sacred water of the Koshi on the head of Lord Baraha, one escapes the birth of pig (boar)."* (A pilgrim attending the Kartik Mela in the Lord Baraha Temple)

*"We came to Vishnupaduka to conduct Shraddha for our dead ancestors. It is said that once you do the Shraddha in Vishnupaduka, the ancestors get liberated."* (A group of pilgrims in Vishnupaduka)

A teacher leading an educational tour of students to the Temples in Vijayapur, Dharan stated a different motive:

*"Our cultural values are diminishing and the cultural knowledge of the new generation is also diminishing. Therefore, we thought an educational tour to religious destination is a way of transferring cultural knowledge to the new generation."*

### **Experiences**

The most common experiences from the pilgrims interviewed during the research related to the feelings of peace, satisfaction, bliss, and positive thoughts.

*"I feel divine whenever I come here. The locals respect the pilgrims and in my 25 years of pilgrimage to this place, none of our women were ever harassed by anyone even when we slept in the open."* (A pilgrim leading a group of 42 members interviewed in the Lord Baraha Temple)

*"When I saw the idol of Lord Baraha, I instantly believed that the Lord really resides in the temple. Our pain and pleasure and our hearts have completely surrendered to god."* (A first-time pilgrim from India visiting the Lord Baraha Temple)

A female pilgrim expressed her dilemma about bringing together pilgrims from her hometown in India:

*"I plan to bring a group of my Indian friends who have been wanting to come here for long. I just need to ensure that they get proper facilities when they come here. The road should be bigger and smoother and the temple should have grandeur of its own."*

A local intellectual recalled the experience of an Indian pilgrim he had met in the past:

*"I had once met a pilgrim who had had a bad experience with the 'Panda' (local Brahmins who act as middlemen and are known for their notorious extortions from pilgrims) in Gaya, Kashi. He told me that he was impressed during his visit in Barahachhetra as he did not have to deal with any 'Panda' here."*

### **Hosts-guests interaction**

The host-guest interaction (originally developed by Valene L. Smith in 1977) between the pilgrims and their local hosts is one of the most important features of Barahachhetra. The quality of hospitality provided to the pilgrims by the local hosts is evident in the pilgrims' commendation of the hospitality they receive from their hosts including the hoteliers, shopkeepers, priests and others. When big fairs and religious events are held in Barahachhetra, many pilgrims stay overnight to attend these events. However, despite the presence of *dharmasalas*, there might not be enough accommodation for the pilgrims and finding a hotel to stay might be out of bounds for several reasons.

When asked how such situations are resolved, the manager of *Shree Barahachhetra Dharmashram Samiti* in the Lord Baraha Temple area said:

*"We allow pilgrims to accommodate even in the rooms, balconies, and spaces that are not normally meant for them. They also accommodate in the hall opposite to the temple. During the Kartik Mela, virtually all houses in the Temple area get converted to temporary lodges for the pilgrims. We do all we can."*

The priests or other temple staffs guide the pilgrims regarding the appropriate way of the temple *darshan* process. The temple management committee members and even other locals help stranded pilgrims whenever there is a need. During the *Kartik Mela*, it was observed that some pilgrim groups negotiated with some hoteliers for group discounts on dinner and the hoteliers agreed. The researchers experienced their share of hospitality in Barahachhetra offered by a few interviewed respondents who were either tempo drivers or street vendors. In Barahachhetra, the local hoteliers and sellers also acknowledge religious needs of the pilgrims. This was exemplified in the compliance by the local hoteliers in the Lord Baraha Temple area to an official

police circular issued on 4 November 2019 on the prohibition of public sale of alcohol and meat products in the local hotels. A hotelier familiar with this rule remarked:

*“This has been done because during the Kartik Mela last year the pilgrims got a bad impression due to open sale of meat, fish and alcohol.”*

Animal sacrifice is a feature of many Hindu temples in Nepal. Although Barahachhetra is not untouched by this tradition, there are hints that the temples in Barahachhetra are slowly eliminating animal sacrifice. For instance, no animal sacrifice exists in the Lord Baraha Temple, the Pindeshwor Temple, the Ramdhuni Temple and the Vishnupaduka Temple. Other temples carry out animal sacrifice but they too are changing. For instance, sacrificing of pigeons is no longer allowed in the Dantakali Temple. In the Auliya Gaddi Math, animal sacrifice is done in the Kali Temple but the priest is of the opinion that it should stop one day. Animal sacrifice is huge in the Budhasubba Temple but on request of the Buddhist communities, the Temple management committee does not promote visit to Budhasubba on the day of Buddha Jayanti, the most important occasion in the Budhasubba tradition, in order to subjugate, on that day, the fervor created by animal sacrifice.

### **The sellers and local livelihoods**

While the priests, religious sects and healers are busy providing their services to the pilgrims, the hoteliers, permanent shopkeepers, temporary shopkeepers, street vendors, and hawkers, from near and far, are also important in providing services to the pilgrims. The pilgrimage in Barahachhetra can be metaphorically referred to as a ‘pilgrimage’ of sellers as, for the sellers, it is akin to attending a pilgrimage when they are able to operate their business to pilgrims during special events and occasions, and even during normal times. The hoteliers and shopkeepers remain especially busy during important occasions and may hire extra workers or expand their business to take advantage of increased flow of customers. During the *Kartik Mela* in the Lord Baraha Temple, many sellers from the nearby villages and villages of other districts such as Dhankuta, Udaypur, Bhojpur, Saptari, Janakpur, and Birgunj come to sell different products. They are also joined by a number of sellers from India.

If there is one most important item that pilgrims can buy in Barahachhetra, it is the *Rudraksha* (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*). It is sold in all the major pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra. While *Rudraksha* seeds are accorded religious importance in Hinduism, they are also considered to have medicinal properties according to Ayurveda (homeopathic). Pilgrims and *Sadhus* (the holy saints) buy *Rudraksha* during the *Kartik Mela* in Barahachhetra and they can buy it for a very cheap price. Moreover, especially those coming from India remain assured that they will not be cheated with fake *Rudraksha*.

*"We bring Rudraksha from our own farm. 30-35 households are engaged in Rudraksha farming in Suryakunda area; we collect from them also. We sell highest amount of Rudraksha in the Kartik and Maghe Mela in Lord Baraha Temple area."* (A Rudraksha seller from Suryakunda interviewed during the Kartik Mela)

Following are some other testimonies to that provide evidence that pilgrimage tourism is an important source of livelihoods for local hoteliers, shopkeepers and other service providers:

*"Approximately 60-65 households in Barahachhetra temple are fully dependent on hotel business. I believe 75% of our income comes from pilgrims."* (An hotelier from the Lord Baraha Temple area)

*"Three hotels are operating here and the business is okay. The road gets obstructed due to flood during rainy season and we close down from Ashad to Bhadra (Jun-July to August-September). If pilgrims could visit the temple round the year, it would benefit 30 households in this area."* (A snacks shop owner in Vishnupaduka, Dharan)

#### Interconnection between the temples

Pilgrimages sites and temples in Barahachhetra are interrelated. This is evidenced by the following examples. The delivery of the *Auliya Baba Nishan* from Auliya Gaddi Math to the Lord Baraha Temple is an indispensable ritual carried out during the *Kartik Mela* in Barahachhetra. Likewise, the sacred water to be offered in Pindeshwor temple in Dharan needs to be collected from the confluence of the *Kaushiki* and the *Kokah* Rivers near the Lord Baraha Temple. Similarly, if the holy fire in *Ramdhuni* is extinguished, it should be re-lit by bringing the holy fire from the Pindeshwor Temple in Dharan and vice-versa.

There is a particular order in each pilgrimage site or temple that the pilgrims need to follow to complete a systematic *darshan* (to prostrate the Gods at the sanctum) of the site. For instance, in the Lord Baraha Temple perimeter, the *darshan* of the gods should start first with the *darshan* of the *Gurubaraha* followed by the Lord Baraha Temple and others. Similarly, the *darshan* in the Pindeshwor Temple follows a particular order from the left to the right. Likewise, pilgrims should pay a visit to Auliya Baba Gaddi after visiting Lord Baraha Temple in order to reap appropriate religious merit.

#### Ritual procedures

Some unique features of the Temples visited were explored in some length during this field research. The priest of the Lord Baraha Temple mentioned the following feature about the system of worships in different temples:



*"In the Baraha Temple, we follow the Vedic method of worship while in the Dantakali Temple and the Pindeshwor Temple, they follow the Shakta and Shaiva methods of worship, respectively. Cooked food is offered to the Pindeshwor Baba in the Pindeshwor temple during Pooja and other rituals but offering cooked food is strictly prohibited in the Lord Baraha Temple"*

A member of the temple management committee in Budhasubba said the following:

*"The most unique feature of the Budhasubba temple is that it is a temple without idol, 'flesh' and 'alcohol' are offered to Budhasubba. Other characteristic features are: the bamboos in here are without tips, crows do not come to this place, and no dew falls inside the temple premises even when the outer premise is soaked with dew. Likewise, so many animals are sacrificed and there is blood everywhere however there are no gnats."*

The main priest of the Pindeshwor Temple stated:

*"The inner structure of the main temple is not believed to be made not by a mortal being but rather by Lord Bishwakarma (the god of architect) himself especially because of the unique geometric design of its inner roof which is made up of a single piece of stone."*

Indeed, the said architect leaves any pilgrim viewing it in a reverential awe as one cannot logically discern how such architect could be created from a single piece of stone.

### **Pilgrimage and the environment**

Adverse impact on the environment is one of the key concerns in Barahachhetra. A few examples demonstrate the impact of human activities in Barahachhetra on the environment. These include increased number of landslides in the Chatara-Barahachhetra route during monsoon due to improper road construction, reduced ground level in the vicinity of the Panchakanya Temple in Dharan due to excess extraction of red mud rendering tree roots to be visible, increased deforestation in the Ramdhuni Preserved Forest leading to changed outlook of the place, pollution of the area on the bank of the Kokah River near the Lord Baraha Temple and the Vishnupaduka Temple due to unmanaged dumping of wastes. An Australian adventure tourist who was interviewed made the following statement:

*"We came Kayaking to Barahachhetra. The fast-running river water, the hills, the wilderness, and the helpful people are all beautiful but we could see many landslides during our journey. That is probably due to tree logging as we could see tractors full of logs on the road."*

### Conflicting Issues

A book (Dharan-Dham-Sangraha), some brochures and postcards have been published by the Dharan Tourism Development Committee which incorporate some pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra. The Barahachhetra Samrakshan Manch has published brochures and some introductory books about Barahachhetra. The Manch has developed a concept note and proposal for the construction of 'Vaikuntha Sarobar' Master Plan in June 2019. Bol Bam Shree Pindeshwor Babadham Samiti has published some booklets about Pindeshwor. Although the local government bodies regularly allocate budget in topics relevant to pilgrimage tourism, they have not been effective. Likewise, conflicts were observed between the main priest and the temple management committees. In a few temples, priests were not invited in the meeting of the temple management committee. The Brihattar (the greater) Barahachhetra Vikas Samiti, the largest government committee has remained non-functional since the existing structure was dissolved in February 2019 after Nepal embarked on three-tier governance structure (as of 30 November 2019). For instance, in the *Kartik Mela*, no active local government participation was observed. Besides, there was no significant coverage of the fair in prominent newspapers. Besides, lack of robust tourism infrastructure- primarily good roads and public transport, transparent income management of temples, rampant encroachment of temple areas, lack of temple maintenance and necessary caution therein, lack of data, lack of promotion, were other management issues observed to be prevalent in Barahachhetra. There is no coordinating mechanism in place among the concerned municipalities or districts exchange information and work together for the enhancement of pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra.

The researchers learned about a conflict between two religious leaders from two different sects in Barahachhetra. A senior local government representative from Chatara opined:

*"Common people should get the feeling of spirituality from saints, hence, it is good if saints complement each other's work rather than compete."*

### Discussions

Hindu pilgrims perceive the sacred landscape of a site in deep reverence and believe that the wishes asked with a pure heart will be granted. The sacred landscape in Barahachhetra includes the myths and legends, the sacred centers, sacred religious rituals, performances and fairs, religious sects, sacred specialists, and the sacred geography comprising of the diverse landscape from the plains to the hills and mountains, sacred water sources, mainly the *Kokah* and the *Kaushiki* (Koshi), the forests, the *Rudraksha* trees that are very much characteristic of the region and so forth. As soon as pilgrims enter this pilgrimage landscape, they are transported into

a realm of sacredness that brings to them an immense sense of peacefulness and satisfaction. An ordinary tourist might simply see rivers, hills, temples and woods in Barahachhetra, but the pilgrims see a landscape charged with divinity, a land that was actually shaped by mythic events (Kinsley, 1998; in Shinde, 2012 p.239).

As discussed earlier, at the root of the origin of Barahachhetra as a pilgrimage region lies the legend of Lord Vishnu who incarnated as *Yagnabaraha* and killed the demon named *Hiranyaksha*. It was in the process of killing the demon that the Lord Baraha got so enraged that he travelled to different places of the Earth looking for other demons like *Hiranyaksha*. His rage did not subside in any way and it was only after he reached the *Kokah-Kaushiki* (name of two sacred rivers) confluence when he fell into the river that he became devoid of rage. This pleased him and he wanted to give *Varadana* (boon) to river *Kokah* who asked the Lord to reside in the confluence of the *Kokah* and *Kaushiki* from the day onwards (Devacharya, 2019, p.4). Thus Barahachhetra is a rare example that demonstrates the power of sacredness of water. One should remember that in the Hindu tradition water is held especially as 'sacred'. The legend of Barahachhetra gives total substance to this belief. This notion of sacredness of the water is enacted by pilgrims who offer the sacred water of the *Kokah-Kaushiki* confluence during their circumambulation in the Lord Baraha Temple area and to the Lord Pindeshwor in the Pindeshwor Temple.

All pilgrimage sites visited in Barahachhetra have mythical mention in the *Puranic* and other Hindu scriptures. Narratives about places have gained prominence in tourism, and some of these narratives are based on mythical events. Studies of tourism show that individuals organize their experiences through myths (Hennig, 2002; Shields, 1991; in Nilsson & Blom, 2018, p.359). This is very true of Barahachhetra. The myths and legends are an indispensable element of pilgrimage in Barahachhetra and they need to be preserved, recorded and transferred to the pilgrims and public. Moreover, ignored mythological sites such as the Suryakunda in the Barahachhetra Municipality need to be revived. In one word, the sacred complex of Barahachhetra and pilgrimage tourism possibility therein is sustained, at the core, by myths and legends which provide the pilgrims with the prospects of salvation for themselves and their ancestors. The significance of a touristic destination, among other things, depends also on historical narratives (Massey, 2005; in Nilsson & Blom, 2018, p.367).

### **Circumambulation**

Chief divinities of pilgrimage, process of *darshan* rituals, ancestral worship & libation, yatra marga (pilgrimage route), accommodation, religious souvenir, *darshan* etc. are some characteristics of Hindu pilgrimage. (Gautam, 2014). While of all these can be seen in Barahachhetra, the process of circumambulation as a way of the temple darshan (prostration) process deserves special mention. Circumambulation, known

as '*Parikrama*' in the Hindu tradition is the ritual of walking around a sacred object or place. Encircling a holy object or site is symbolic of an entire pilgrimage journey as well as a visible sign of a pilgrim's respectful adoration of the holy (Davidson & Gitlitz, 2002, p.113). These terms are mostly used in the context of religious deities in temples, sacred rivers, sacred hills and a close cluster of temples, and "doing a Parikrama", as a symbol of prayer, is an integral part of Hindu worship (Singh & Sehgal, 2017, p.450). In the context of pilgrimage to Barahachhetra, elements of circumambulation prevail in all pilgrimage sites and temples. As Sinha (2014, p.66) has discussed in the context of the sacred landscape of Braj, India, the sacred landscape of Barahachhetra is also felt, tasted, and inscribed in the body through daily rituals, circumambulation, festivals, fairs, and other life and death rituals that are constantly ongoing in one sacred space or the other.

### **Attractions & authenticity**

Sanctity is central to the maintenance of the religious sense or authenticity of a place (Olsen, 2006; in Hung et al.,2016), and it is commonly used interchangeably used with authenticity in religious tourism. The concept of authenticity in relation to pilgrimage experience has been used quite often (Belhassen et al., 2008; Andriotis, 2011; Kim & Jamal 2007; in Jirásek, 2014, p.50). Authenticity in pilgrimage tourism can be termed as the originality pilgrims perceive in their experience of the pilgrimage site. The combination of the sacred geography, spaces, temples, rituals and fairs, specialists and rivers on the one hand, and the religious sects and organizations, *dharmashalas*, Sankrit education centers, local hospitality, authentic local products such as the *Rudraksha*, and the opportunity to explore non-religious natural attractions in the periphery of the pilgrimage sites render the pilgrimage to Barahachhetra an authentic pilgrimage tourism experience. The idea of authenticity became a central feature of tourism studies after Boorstin's (1964) proposal of the model of transformation of the historical traveler to a modern tourist whereby the latter enjoys the 'pseudo-events' instead of the real world around him, pilgrimage to Barahachhetra does not present any pseudo-events but authentic experience. Most importantly, pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra can be found as they have been described in the ancient Hindu scriptures, and various myths and legends relating to them testify their authenticity. Similar to what Kunwar & Ghimire (2012) found in their study of Lumbini, both the visitor experience (activity-related authenticity) and the toured objects themselves (object-related authenticity) can be experienced with regards to pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra.

### **Hospitality**

It has been widely accepted that pilgrimage and religion-induced travels manifest a common sacred journey ritual (Sharply & Sundaram, 2005; in Kim, Kim & King,

2019). However, as secularisation has accelerated a growing number of anthropological studies have illuminated the sacred- secular bipolarity between pilgrimage and tourism and between pilgrims and tourists (Kim et al., 2019). As a core component of experiencing religious tourism and pilgrimage, hospitality is strongly rooted within religion (Kirilova, Gilmetdinova, & Lheto, 2014). Connecting with communities and strangers, hospitality is supported by diverse religious teachings. Apart from meaning of hospitality associated with religious values, commercial associations with hospitality lead to different interpretations and behaviours (Kirilova et al., 2014).

The word hospitality comes from hospice, an old French word meaning “to provide care/shelter for travelers.” (Walker & Walker, 2014, p.4). The origin of hospitality cannot be traced back to a point in time as hospitality has co-existed with civilization, only the forms have changed. Hospitality is an indispensable requirement for tourism to thrive. According to Lashley and Morrison (2000), hospitality requires the guest to feel that the host is being hospitable through feelings of generosity, a desire to please and a genuine regard for the guest as an individual (Lashley & Morrison, 2000; in Kunwar, 2016, p.58). As testified by the pilgrims during the field study, the hosts in Barahachhetra are found to exhibit a very strong sense of hospitality towards the incoming pilgrims. While some religious seekers arrive at Barahachhetra to supplement the work of their affiliated sects and organizations, others even extend any outstanding support to the pilgrims for example when they are stranded. The Nepalese brand of hospitality is *Atithidevo bhava* which means let the guests treat as God. Likewise, the *dharmashala*, hoteliers and the locals continuously cater to the pilgrims’ needs. Acknowledgement of past donations made by pilgrims, response to pilgrims’ queries by locals and hosts in the temple and non-temple areas, compliance on prohibition on the sale of alcohol are some other expressions of hospitality in the different pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra.

### **The changing tradition**

The area of Barahachhetra has been at the forefront of important pilgrimage region in Nepal. However, Barahachhetra gained wider audience specifically after the commencement of the *Kumbha* tradition in Barahachhetra in Nepal in Apr-May 2002. Ever since, the *Kumbha* tradition has not only been attracting more pilgrims in the event and, by and large, in Barahachhetra as a whole, but also in educating the domestic pilgrims about the importance of Barahachhetra. Moreover, the outflow of Nepalese pilgrims to the *Kumbha Mela* sites in India has reduced to a large extent.

### **Pilgrims’ motivations**

Motivation can be defined as the driving force that is within all human beings, that is something that commits a person to a course of action (Mullins, 2009, p.479–518; in Blackwell, 2010, p.27). Many pilgrimage places draw devotees through

their reputation for granting some specific spiritual, social or material blessing, usually expressed in terms of purification and the healing of soul, mind and body (Stoddard, 1997; in Singh & Haigh, 2015). However, Hindu pilgrimage is also a social duty, a rite of passage, and a way of gaining favor, which “equally involves searching for spiritual experience in special places and learning that these material places lie outside the spiritual, mystical, true reality” (Sopher, 1987: 15; in Singh & Haigh, 2015). However, there are limited studies into motivations for pilgrimage Blackwell (2010, p.26). Blackwell (2010, p.32-34), drawing from the various works of different authors, identifies a number of motivations for pilgrimage such as religion, adventure, religious merit, to get away from everyday living and so forth. In the field study regarding motivations for visiting pilgrimage center in Krakow, Poland, the authors identify three kinds of motivations: tourist motivations (sightseeing, prayer, pilgrimage), religious motivations (service, confession), and recreational motivations (walking, spending time with family) (Liro, Soljan & Bilska-Wodecka, 2017, p.423). In the case of Barahachhetra, the motivations of pilgrims mostly conformed to religious motivations During pilgrimage, pilgrims may search for ‘a cure for physical or spiritual problems, or seeking a sense of belonging to fill a spiritual vacuum, or may be motivated by a deep desire to connect with like-minded individuals who will reinforce their sense of self and their place in the universe’ (Singh, 2013; in McIntosh, 2017, p. 10). This is largely true of the pilgrim tourists in Barahachhetra. The researchers found the following common types of motivation among pilgrims in Barahachhetra:

- a. To get rid of sins
- b. To avoid being born as boar
- c. To conduct *shraddha* rituals for liberating deceased ancestors
- d. To conduct specific rituals (e.g. *Rudri* recitation and *Navagraha Shanti*)
- e. To fulfill the Vakal (promise made to god)
- f. To get education
- g. To fulfill elderly’s wish for pilgrimage
- h. To get wishes fulfilled
- i. To wish for better future of family members
- j. To get rid of diseases and disability
- k. To attain peace of mind

Raj (2015, p.189) states the individual experiences of the participants in the Hajj ritual in the City of Makkah in the following words “*The hajj pilgrims feel unanimous in their view that nothing can quite prepare them for the sheer beauty of the experience*

and the overwhelming feeling of humbleness that overcomes one during the pilgrimage of hajj". The experience of the pilgrims interviewed in Barahachhetra with regards to their inner experience was no different. However, most of the pilgrims also seemed to be wary of the road condition, sanitation issues and limited police presence in the Temples they visited.

### **Typology of pilgrims**

A widely followed theory of marketing argues that every market consists of groups or "segments" of customers with different needs and demands (Kamla-Raj, 2010; in Vijayananda, 2014). It should be noted here that segments are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, and this would also apply to pilgrimage tourism. To further identify the pilgrimage tourists and analyze his/her purchasing behavior, there is a need to build a typology of pilgrimage tourists. Typology comes from the Greek word "Typus" and describes various types of persons based on his/her behavior and attitudes (Rountree, 2002; in Vijayananda, 2014). The definitive study of typology would help to understand the characteristics and motives of different types of pilgrimage tourists.

Schmidt (2009; in Singh & Haigh, 2015, p.785) gives the following typology of pilgrims: devotional, healing, obligatory or socially required, ritual cycle and wandering. Most of the pilgrimage tourists the researchers came across during the field study confirmed to one or more of the first four in these categories. Singh and Haigh (2015, p.785-786) propose a five-fold typology of pilgrims based on their motivations: a) Tourists- who have no major spiritual or emotional engagement with the sacred messages of the site, b) Pilgrims of Duty- who travel to the sacred not necessarily through belief, but out of respect to their Social Dharma, c) Pilgrims of Need- people who travel on a pilgrimage in order to gain some result in the material world, d) Pilgrims of Hope- who seek spiritual uplift from association with the Supreme, and e) Pilgrims of Union- true Spiritual Seekers for whom all experience is a spiritual journey, who follow *moksha dharma*, a path that seeks escape from the material world and the Hindu cycle of rebirth. Most of the pilgrimage tourists in Barahachhetra seem to belong to two categories: 'Pilgrims of Need' and 'Pilgrims of Hope'. In the case study of the Haifa's Baha' 'i' Gardens, Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell (2006, p.43-44) find the presence of both kinds of tourist despite the site's religious connotation: the secular tourist and the religious tourist. In Barahachhetra, it is mostly the religious tourists who visit but also those who visit their friends and relatives and come to enjoy the natural beauty of the region at the same time. During this field study, based on the frequency of visits, pilgrimage tourists could be categorized into two groups:

- a. Frequent visitors: More than 50% of the pilgrims who were interviewed during the field study had visited at least once before.



- b. First timers: Nearly 40% of the pilgrims who were interviewed during the field study mentioned that they were visiting Barahachhetra for the first time.

Likewise, on the basis of the stay duration, the following groups were identified:

- a. Day trippers: Most of the pilgrims visiting religious sites in Barahachhetra, in general, are day trippers. They tend to visit the intended pilgrimage site and return on the same day.
- b. Overnight stayers: During special occasions such as the Kartik Mela, Bol Bam and Kumbha Mela, many pilgrims visiting Barahachhetra stay for a night or two before returning from the journey.

Another distinct category of pilgrimage tourists identified was:

- a. Pollution makers: Sanitation is a significant issue in Barahachhetra. Particularly the pilgrims attending religious fairs and events contribute a significant portion of garbage and pollution in the pilgrimage sites.

### **Rejection of domination of Brahminical priesthood**

The sacred landscape of Barahachhetra is not engulfed by the all-pervading influence of Brahmanical Priesthood as concluded by Vidyarthi (1961) because the priests of the temples are not necessarily Brahmins by birth and are fully accepted by the pilgrims. The findings from this study also concur with what Jha's (1971) findings in his study of the sacred complex of Janakpur in that 'the boundary of a nation is not the boundary of a civilization' (Jha, 1971, p. 105). This is exemplified by the inflow of not only domestic pilgrims but also pilgrims from other countries, mainly India but also Myanmar, Bhutan, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This unique finding from this study can be another pull factor for pilgrims from various religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

### **Pilgrimage tourism and peace**

The quest for healing, according to Dubisch and Winkelmann (2005, p. 1; in McIntosh, 2017, p. 10) is often described by pilgrims in spiritual terms as restoring one's relationship with oneself (or one's God, whoever or whatever one might conceive that to be). In their case study of pilgrimage tourism in the Sindh Valley in Kashmir, Bhat & P. J. (2015, p. 65) conclude that the festive tradition in Kashmir that features in every district is regarded as the main tool for peace, communal harmony and common ethos of Kashmiriyat and that the religious festivals such as Kheer Bhawani uniquely help in promoting socio-religious harmony. The following elements of peace occupy a prominent space in the context of pilgrimage to Barahachhetra:

### **Religious tolerance, healing and rejection of violence**

Tolerance is the "tendency to put up with individuals and groups that abide by a set

of values, norms, customs, and political goals that is different from one's own" (Russell & Steve, 2010; in Shinde, 2015, p.180). Religious pluralism implies co-existence of diverse religious beliefs and practices and the equal importance they garner from their respective followers (Shinde & Pinkney, 2013; in Shinde, 2015, p.180). Both intra-religion and inter-religion tolerance is observed in the case of Barahachhetra. The harmonious existence of different religious sects in Barahachhetra relates to intra-religion religion tolerance. Likewise, the co-existence of Hindu temples alongside Buddhist monasteries in pilgrimage sites in the region, and the diversity in the religion in the *communitas* of pilgrims, including Hindu, Hindu-Buddhist, Hindu-Kirat, Buddhist, Muslim, Kabir followers and Bonpo, visiting pilgrimage sites in Barahachhetra relates to inter-religion tolerance. Religious tourism can be a catalyst for peace and long-lasting friendship, and religious understanding between hosts and visitors. The dialogue between cultures, religions and broader civilizations offers an opportunity for tourism (UNWTO, 2007; Chand, 2010; Apostolopoulos et al., 2013; Sharma, 2013; in Bilim & Duzguner, 2015, p.86). In Barahachhetra, religious tolerance is displayed in the *communitas* of pilgrimage tourists from different religious sects and different religious traditions. Likewise, the acceptance of Brahmin and non-Brahmin priests in the different temples in Barahachhetra also reinforces religious tolerance, pluralism and acceptance.

Interviews conducted during the field research clearly showed that a vast majority of pilgrimage tourists pay a visit to the different sacred sites and temples in Barahachhetra for healing. As mentioned earlier, on the one hand they seek healing from the divine maladies, while, on the other, they seek healing from worldly diseases. Most of the pilgrims converged that their ultimate motivation behind visiting Barahachhetra was to gain peace and that their visit to Barahachhetra offered them a healing effect at the level of the soul.

Despite the fact that animal sacrifice is a common feature of many Hindu temples, a prohibition on animal sacrifice in the Lord Baraha Temple, Pindeshwor Temple, Ramdhuni Temple and Vishnupaduka Temple, and certain restrictions in other temples such as the Dantakali Temple, Auliya Math and Budhasubba Temple can be inferred as a gradual rejection of physical violence.

### **Pilgrimage & environment**

The literature on pilgrimage has paid a little attention to the dynamics of environment in pilgrimage destinations and the implications of pilgrimage for sacred sites (Shinde, 2007, p.344). Even when environmental problems are recognized, they are articulated with reference to an imagined glorious past (Alley, 2002; Joseph, 1994; in Shinde, 2012, p.116). The fact that the ideas of environmental change are often limited to the effects visible in the religious-cultural sphere tends to overlook the use

of pilgrimage sites for different forms of tourism and the problems these generate in the physical environment (Shinde, 2012, p. 117).

In Barahachhetra the environmental element seems overlooked and ignored. The environmental degradation affects not only the religious environment land sacred landscape, it also has long term impact in the geography of the region. Taking the example of Tirumala-Tirupati, a popular pilgrimage center in south India, Shinde (2007, p. 349, 356) mentions growth in scale, frequency and character of pilgrims' visits one the one hand and urban growth of the place as two factors affecting the environment in a pilgrimage center. The study on Barahachhetra finds that the environmental degradation is primarily due to lack of efficient development project plans and the lack of robust waste management system and the contribution of irresponsible behavior of some pilgrims in 'pollution' of the environment can only have secondary attribution, and there is high likelihood that resolution of the former problem will largely resolve the latter problem. Above all, it should always be considered that undertaking a pilgrimage on foot is one of the ways to experience the numinous quality of the landscape (Entwistle, 1987; Haberman, 1994, in Shinde, 2012, p.117). In the case of Barahachhetra, pilgrimage on foot is the utmost expression of their devotion and commitment by the pilgrims and a polluted environment may dissuade pilgrims to undertake such journeys. The occasional master plans should account environmental factor as an important aspect of the overall plan and be implemented accordingly. Moreover, environmental impact assessment of development projects in Barahachhetra should be indispensable part of such such projects and should be strictly implemented.

### **Pilgrimage tourism sustainability**

Sustainable tourism has three main objectives: meeting the needs of the host population; satisfying the demands of a growing number of tourists; and safeguarding the natural environment in order to achieve these aims (Cater, 1993; in Kunwar, 2017, p.273). It is only recently that scholars, governments, and tourism agencies have taken notice of the increasing numbers of religiously motivated travelers mainly owing to the economic potential of religious tourists (Olsen & Timothy, 2006, p.1). For example, in their quantitative analysis of socio economic impact of pilgrimage tourism in Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu, India, Ashfaq & Parveen (2014, p. 249) conclude that pilgrimage tourism particularly at the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi is the life line of Jammu region. In a later study on the same temple, Singh & Bahadur (2018, p.836) conclude that there is a positive relationship between the growth of pilgrimage tourism and other types of tourism and that the growth of pilgrimage tourism contributes significantly to the sustainable development of the host population. There is a rising pattern of geocapital formation around prominent shrines and temples, especially those situated in readily accessible places (Bhattarai,

Conway, & Shrestha, 2005, p.678). As found from the present study on pilgrimage in Barahachhetra, pilgrimage tourism has become a means of livelihoods for the locals from the areas adjoining the pilgrimage sites and for non-locals who arrive to Barahachhetra on different occasions to sell their products. In other words, earning from pilgrimage tourism has helped transportation personnel, hoteliers, shopkeepers, hawkers, street vendors and others. Moreover, the offerings made by the pilgrims makes a significant contribution to the temples in Barahachhetra. Pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra, owing to its potential to attract high number of pilgrims and devotees, also provides a reason for the local and the central level governments to come up with long-term and coordinated plans for enhancing pilgrimage tourism infrastructure in the region. Pilgrimage tourism sustainability of Barahachhetra also requires blending pilgrimage tourism with recreational tourism in the vicinity because except for the aspects of veneration and faith, regarded in a broader sense, pilgrimage involves trips in nature, trips, visiting various places [...] and purchasing some souvenirs (Gupta, 1999, p.31; in TÎRCA, Stanciulescu, Chis, & Bacila, 2010).

### **Destination brand management**

According to Blain, Levy & Ritchie ( 2005, p.337), destination branding, comprises of a set of marketing activities, that, among other things, convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination and serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination. Destination image is defined as “not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination” (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p.8; in Blain, Levy & Brent Ritchie, 2005, p.330). In the context of pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra, the destination image warrants furthest attention because destination image has been shown to be a significant factor in determining visitor choice (Lee, O’Leary, & Hong, 2002; in Blain, Levy & Brent Ritchie, 2005, p.330). The various conflicts- between the priests and temple management committee, conflict between religious leaders, allegations on the *Sadhus*, insufficiency of tourism infrastructure, and lack of government action on pilgrimage tourism will all have an adverse impact on the destination brand of Barahachhetra. These need to be mitigated, addressed and overcome by highlighting the importance of the sacred element in Barahachhetra as a high-potential pilgrimage tourism destination and region.

Easy travel between pilgrimage sites, exploration of adventure tourism possibilities, introduction of recreational parks and picnic spots, and development of packages for blended religious and nature tours to Barahachhetra and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve can make pilgrimage tourism in Barahachhetra a greater and sustainable possibility.

- 'Summer City' in Suryakunda area due to the variation of its climatic conditions from chilling cold to warm weather.
- Connecting Belka Municipality in Udaypur district and Sangurigadi Municipality in Dhankuta district through a bridge. Initiating Bungy adventure and Mainamaini Darshan in Udaypur district.

These possibilities need to be explored with a comprehensive plan. However, to enhance the pilgrimage tourism situation, in general, there are a number of tasks that can be initiated- first and the foremost, the focus should be on enhancing pilgrimage tourism infrastructure and promoting the region in different ways. There is a need to run one standard hotel at Chatara because Chatara is going to be newly emerging tourist attraction where every day more than one hundred fifty people, on the way back from Barahachhetra, will make river journey by motorboat at Koshi river. Now there are five small hotels including some restaurants which will provide lodging and fooding. The capacity of ten motorboats is estimated approximately one hundred forty seats which would be occupied by the pilgrims every day.

Some of the recommendations are:

- To bring environmental awareness at the pilgrimage site.
- Prohibit the use of plastic in temple area and make mandatory the use of woven leaves or plant based bags.
- Ensure dedicated garbage collection mechanism in all sites.
- Identify a special pilgrimage tourism souvenir that carries the identity of Barahachhetra. *Rudraksha* beads can be one of them.
- Ensure telecommunication and wifi in pilgrimage sites.
- Reprint different old and new books about Barahachhetra and provide them to pilgrim at minimum price.
- Create at least one dedicated website and a YouTube channel to promote Barahachhetra.
- Create links with Nepali and Indian religious TV channels to transmit information about the pilgrimage sites.
- Connect Barahachhetra Hindu pilgrimage tourism to Koshi Tappu Safari, trip, Vedetar hill station and Wetland areas in Sunsari district.
- There should be some signpost at the entrance point of Jhumka, Dharan and Chatara with distance, elevation and the name of the monuments located at Barahachhetra.

## Conclusion

In align with the ideas of Raj, Griffin & Blackwell (2015, p.106), pilgrimage incorporates religious involvement as a central feature of the pilgrim's journey. This largely holds true for Barahachhetra, however the secular landscape is also an integral part of the pilgrimage system in Barahachhetra. This paper highlights the major characteristic features of pilgrimage system in Barahachhetra through the study of the sacred landscape of Barahachhetra. Barahachhetra apparently departs from Brahmanical priesthood, a feature that mostly dominates pilgrimage destinations and reflects. On the one hand its authenticity is reinforced by the myths and legends, fairs and festivals including other events such as the *Kartik Mela* and the *Kumbha Mela*. On the other hand, its unique features, outstanding elements of hospitality, religious tolerance and plurality, and possibility of blending pilgrimage tourism with recreational and adventure tourism provides a strong potential for sustainable tourism that can contribute to the region's economy. Therefore, Barahachhetra is an authentic pilgrimage tourism destination for people from all religions waiting for a comprehensive and coordinated plan to rejuvenate itself.

As time passed by, the change in the mode and method of travel also signifies a shift in the patterns of religiosity and religious behavior. The aspirations and demands of religious tourism, to a large extent, drive the packing of a pilgrimage land scape. It is necessary to consider such land scapes and contemporary pilgrimages (where root and body become road and car) as challenges for understanding the aesthetics associated with emerging forms of religious tourism (Shinde 2012, p.104).

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