

## Pilgrimage Tour Mobility between Nepal and India

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### **Abstract**

*There is a great affiliation of pilgrimage tour in Nepal and India. This paper examines, mobility in connection to its effect on tourism industry, reflecting scope by comparing data, and its socio-cultural analysis. Religion is the main reason for high mobility as there are numerous Hindu and Buddhist association between these countries. Hence, This paper draws an understanding of religion connectivity with data presentation and linkage on various religious trails. This study basically uses trend analysis as method applying on several data obtained from government and other sources. The results are then compared to each nation's potential mobility and socio-economic transaction. There are promising results for pilgrimage tour mobility as these nations' shares common religious destinations and values.*

**Keywords:** *Mobility; Religion; Connectivity; Data*

### **1- Introduction**

The focus of the study is to illustrate pilgrimage mobility between Nepal and India. These two neighboring countries share some common rituals, rites, festival, religion and values. So, there is high influx of religious tourist in context to pilgrimage destinations between them. The mobility for pilgrimage tour in the world is high enough to contribute economic activities and growth of any nations. 60% of the world population practices the religion and these believers are the source of the demographic base for religious tourism. An estimation of about six hundred millions national and international (religious and spiritual) voyages take place in the world, of which 40% is in Europe and about half in Asia [1]. Religious tourism has been an overshadow research areas. Many countries do not even bother to find the purpose of visits by tourist. Pilgrimage tourism has huge potential throughout the world but there has been difficulty in defining pilgrimage tourism because it is not always the spiritual faith as driving factors. They may not also be from same religion but can expose high propensity towards religion destination. These tourists, since they are driven by factors other than religion also has to be considered as pilgrimage tourist. But one of the important parameters to consider them as pilgrimage tourist is group mobility. Since there are no standard definitions about pilgrimage tourism, it is difficult to measure data. And yet another problem is whether to include domestic religious tourists or not [3]. But for the purpose of this study, Indian and Nepalese citizens' mobility across each other borders, purely for religious purpose in different pilgrimage destinations are considered. An International Conference on Religious Tourism in Fatima, Portugal, World Tourism Organization estimates that about 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites every year, with approximately six hundred million national and international religious voyages in the world [4]. An interesting group called ARC (Alliance of Religions and Conservation) claims that "It is impossible to get fully accurate figures for the number of pilgrims to most sites" because in many places, records are not necessarily kept. However, ARC estimates that more than 200 million people go on pilgrimage every year – with the duration of the trip varying from hours to days, and sometimes pilgrims "leave home for many months". It is clearly evident that this 200m figure is incredibly conservative, since it only includes numbers visiting 38 of the world's largest pilgrimage sites [5]. In this study, the pilgrimage tour is purely defined to be cross border mobility for religious purpose in different religious trial. Pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place of high religious value.

For example devotees visit religious places like Pashupatinath, Gaya, Badri Kedar, Lumbini, Tirupati, Ayodhya and Janaki Mandir for faith and special belief. Charles Mann's work from National Geographic shows us that religion instigated "more people coming together in one place than had likely occurred before" [6]. Mostly, pilgrims are a sacred travelling along with common values and related to salvation and peace. Thus, pilgrimage tour produces economic activities, cultural linkage and a way to get ultimate satisfaction through faith. It is increasingly growing sector of the tourism industry. It has diverse socio-economic connection. Religious tourism generates benefits for all its stakeholders. On the one hand, religious entities can obtain a greater volume of donations and charity. On the other hand, the tourist motivated by faith participates in the resident trade by buying some souvenir or leaving some votive offering, which helps the reactivation of certain local craft activities [2]. Also, there are transaction within Hotel, Vehicle, Restaurant and infrastructural improvements sites. The basis for this paper is pilgrimage mobility in Nepal and India as these countries share many pilgrimage trails, common faith and values in affiliation to Hindu and Buddhist.

## 2- Motivation and Objectives:

The main motivation for the study is because of the high religious connectivity between Nepal and India. There are different Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage destination and religious trail with large number of influx across borders. The study by Nyaupane, Timothy and Poudel shows that those who identify themselves as pilgrims have higher religious motivations, and those who identify themselves as tourists have higher recreational or cultural motivations [7]. Pilgrimage tour mobility in Nepal and India is due to greater religious affinity among the people and open border connectivity. The associations of Hindu and Buddhist circuit are widely accepted in both the countries. Since they share common values, faith, rites and rituals, their mobility is because of religious affinity, common belief, and intensity to salvation (happiness). Although, the GDP contribution of tourism is negligible, it is important economic area in Nepal. It has been contributing towards employment generation, income and mode to foreign exchange earnings. It created 426,500 jobs, earned USD 497.8 million in government revenues and contributed 4% to Gross Domestic Product in 2015 [8]. Some 790,118 international visitors landed Nepal in 2014. However, this data decreased to 538,970 due to devastating earthquake. The major contributor with nearly 20 percent of total tourist arrivals in Nepal is India. The total number of Indian visitors by air was 135,343 in 2014 and 75,124 in 2015. The Indian tourists entering through land are not included because of lack of proper data in Nepal. The huge influx of pilgrimage tourist exists in border from both sides. But due to lack of proper data entry, real purpose of visit cannot be identified. So, it is likely that number of tourist will increase considerably if proper data entry is maintained from both sides. Out of many reasons, an Indian visits Nepal due to religious faith so; Nepal has huge pilgrimage potential due to gigantic population (1.353 Billion) in India. For instance, 10 million pilgrimage visitors can be expected out of total populations.

Similarly, India received some 8.027 million visitors in 2015. Nepal is among top 15 markets for India in terms of tourist arrivals, a total of 154,720 Nepali nationals visited India same year. 93.9% of total Nepalese traveling to India used air route while 6.1% used land route being religious tour as important mission [9]. A study conducted by the Indian Ministry of Tourism (domestic tourism Survey) reported that more than 100 million visitors travelled for 'religious purposes and pilgrimages' and eight of the top-ten ranking domestic tourist destinations were pilgrimage sites [10]. According to the Ministry's Tourism Satellite Accounts, religious tourism segment contributed almost 20% towards the total domestic tourism consumption (approximately INR 2.8 Billion) and this contribution is likely to increase annually. Both countries share amazing Hindu and Buddhist religious creating mobility and employment and hence contributing towards GDP of each nation. There are no any sharp differentiations between cultural and religious tourist in Asia. Practically all Asian archaeological monuments are interrelated to religions. Thus, the separation of travel motivation is hard except otherwise indicated to be pilgrimage or religious. But in Nepal and India, the mobility is purely for religious and pilgrimage tour. For example, there is a belief that an Indian must visit Pashupatinath Temple (Nepal), in fact all Hindu once in their life.

This study examines the interrelationship between pilgrimage mobility as Nepal and India do not maintain data entry records in boarders. This study illustrates two major purposes:

1. To understand religious motives and faith among the visitors during pilgrimage tour;
2. To understand about mobility and possible impact on pilgrimage tour in future.

### 3- Religious connectivity

Nepal and India has deeper connectivity due to various reasons. They share common customs, culture and belief and thoughts. Moreover, the open border access has made high mobility between the citizens leading trade and business. The connectivity is even deeper when it comes to religious matter. Religious tourism has been in existence since ancient time. However, it recently received an attention by an academicians and public sector. Religious mobility was never estimated to be tourism sector which has been contributing to economic activities. The number of pilgrimage tour has increased considerably because of proper information about culture, tradition, rituals and rites, emotions, destination and ultimate desire for salvation. Directly or indirectly, the aim of religious tourism is to enhance economy, which can be obtained by promoting in nation and abroad. There are many religious trails in Nepal and India. For example a long pilgrimage trail connecting Pashupatinath and 12 Jyotirlingas, Buddhist circuits in Lumbini, Gaya, Sarnath and Kapilvastu. Further, Kathmandu valley in Nepal, the city of Temples, living Goddesses, Boudhanath, Budhanilkantha and Syombhunath can be projected as ancient city religious tour packages. In India, Tirupati tour can be an excellent pilgrimage package for Nepalese. These religious sites bear significance values to both countries for pilgrimage tour. Some other example of popular trail in Nepal is Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, In India Bodh Gaya, Sarnath which are sought most by Buddhist. Likewise, Janakpur, Muktinath, and Halesi Mahadeva, Swargadawri, Ridi, Baraha are sacred Hindu destination. Similarly, a large number Hindu site in India like Chardham, Haridwar, Varanasi, Prayag, Gaya, Puri, Tirupati, Somnath and Rameshwaram are popular among Nepalese tourist. The Maha Khumbh Mela, in India is the largest congregation of humanity with 100 million Hindu pilgrims from around the world taking holy bath for purification. Buddhists and Hindus consider India to be the most spiritual country on earth [11]. People’s mobility in open border (Nepal-India) occurs, making difficulty in estimating data as there is no proper data entry system. And more difficult task is to find out what the tour purpose is about.

**Table1: Some of the Global Religious Events**

Number of Tourist (Average)	Description
100 millions	Kumbh mela, Hindu pilgrimage gathering every three year for purification from sin in Ganga
30 millions	Shrine to Ayyappan at Sabarimalai, India
13 millions	Harmandir Sahib, Golden Temple, Amritsar, India
10 millions	Tirumala Venkateswara Temple Tirupati, India
10 millions	Nanputuo Temple, Xianmen, China

**Source: ARC, 2014, Estimate of World Figures**

The relationship between India and Nepal share many common characteristics like similar culture, faith and belief, tradition, customs and direct people to people affinity. The border between them is 1,753 kilometers in length with free flow open border access for citizens. Both countries have renowned religious destination and trail for Hindu and Buddhist. Therefore, these interrelated religious and cultural sites along with equal support from both sides can boost religious tourism. There is a huge trade relationship between these countries. Almost 60% of total trade in Nepal is with India. Nepal received almost 23% of Indian visitors (by air) out of total visitors. India is top 1 country in foreign visitors’ arrivals (2017). At the same time, Nepal is among the top 15 source markets for FTAs in India (2014). The 15 countries including Nepal accounted for about 71.97% of total FTAs to India in 2014.

Both India and Nepal are secular state, where majority of population are Hindu. So the major destinations are Hindu based pilgrimage routes. Nepal and India has long borders where a large

number of Hindu and Buddhist population resides. Thus both countries receive huge influx of Hindu and Buddhist devotees every year.

#### 4- Methods and Results:

Basically the exploratory nature of this research made researcher use secondary data from various resources like government agency and immigration office in Borders. An in-depth indirect observation with was made for more than a month to understand the influx of people. The mobility do not defined the exact purpose of visit however, the visit was intended for either leisure/pleasure or religious besides shopping and one day border cross over to spend single day visit. A thorough study is needed to examine exact purpose of visit by the people of these countries. The collected data are then linked and analyze based on mobility and purpose of visit (mainly pilgrimage). The researcher also draws an attention to sort number of religious tourist out of total number of visitors for each country.

**Table 2: Number of Arrivals (Nepal)**

Means	2017	2018	Percentage Change
<b>Tourist Arrivals by</b>			
Air	760577	969287	27.44
Land	179641	203785	13.77
Total	940218	1173072	24.77
Average length of stay	12.6	12.4	-1.59
<b>Top Ranking Nations</b>			
Top 1	India	India	N/A
Top 2	China	China	
Top 3	USA	USA	
Top 4	UK	Sri Lanka	
Top 5	Sri Lanka	UK	
<b>Purpose</b>			
Leisure/Pleasure	658153	703843	6.47
Pilgrimage	141033	187692	24.86
Trekking and Mountaineering	75217	169180	55.54
Others	65815	112357	41.42
<b>Revenue from Tourism</b>			
Total Earnings (USD in Thousand)	658092	703179	6.41
Average Expenses per visitor per day	54	44	-22.73

*Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2018*

According to data in Table 2, the largest number of visitors is from India so their ranking is number 1. This data excludes Indian visitors by Land. If Indian visitors by land are also included, than the numbers of visitors will increases sharply. The second position held by China and Sri Lanka surpassing United Kingdom in 2018 indicates higher possibilities for Buddhist pilgrimage. The data

also indicate, Nepal is widely popular for pilgrimage tour because Pilgrimage purpose is next to holiday and leisure segment. The National Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025 claims that almost 15% (by air) of arrivals is from India, 60% of arrivals from Sri Lanka and 45% of arrivals from Thailand visit Nepal for religious purpose[10].

**Table 3: Year wise Indian Tourist in Lumbini (Buddhist religious trail)**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Visitors	120583	150252	154216	130262	134269	155444	192410

Source: Nepal

**Tourism Statistics, 2018**

Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha, was visited by 192410 Indian in 2018. The number in 2014 was 154,216 almost similar to 2017. But the number declined in 2015 and 2016 due to huge earthquake (2015). The number is increasing since 2017. Lumbini is popular pilgrimage destination by international visitors because its a birth place of Buddha and often carries faith and sentiments of Buddhism. The total number of visitors was 15, 17,134 out of which 76.16% were Nepalese (domestic visitors), 12.68% Indians and 11.16 % from other countries. The change of percent of Indian visitors in 2017 with that of 2018 is 2.68% in an increasing order. According to Lumbini Development Trust, the favorable time to visit Lumbini is in February.

**Table 4: Indian Pilgrimage Tourist arrival in Nepal (2010-2014)**

Year	Total Arrivals	Indian Arrivals (by air only)	% of Indian Arrivals	Total Number of Pilgrimage Tourists	% of Pilgrimage Tourist
2010	602,867	120,898	20.05	101,335	16.8
2011	736,215	149,504	20.31	67,783	8.7
2012	803,092	165,815	20.65	109,854	13.7
2013	797,616	180,974	22.69	40,678	5.1
2014	790,118	135,343	17.13	98,765	12.5

Source: Government of Nepal,

**Department of Immigration, 2015**

Again, this data does not include over land Indian visitors through borders. This five year data purely indicate the purpose of visit to be Pilgrimage. In 2012, there was highest pilgrimage tourist (109,854) whereas in 2013 it was lowest. But the highest percentage of pilgrimage tourist out of total arrivals was in 2010 and lowest percentage was in 2013. The number of pilgrimage tourist drop sharply in 2013 (40,678) although the total arrivals was almost as same as to that of 2012. It needs another study to confirm the reasons for its fall. This is alarming because despite religious tourism high potential, it is dropping. Nepal was hit hard by earthquake in 2015, so it lacks data.

**Table 5: Arrivals by Land (Indian visitors)**

Serial Number	Mobility	Arrivals
1	Total overland arrivals by various modes of transportation from the survey (2014)	1,439,586
2	Total arrival of Third Countries overland tourist (2014)	140,878
	Net arrivals of Indian visitors overland using various modes of transportation (A-B)	1,298708

Source: Government of Nepal,

**Department of Immigration, 2015**

The open border between Nepal and India has both pros and cons. For example, it is very easy to pass from one border to another but data entries are often neglected. For this reason, the researcher

had difficulty in getting data from both sources. Many immigration offices were approached for official data. But there were no proper data management; many times the visitors were permitted without entry. The visitors through land cannot be neglected because it includes large influx for pilgrimage purpose. So if these statistics are well maintain, many important references (like total number for religious Purpose, Total arrivals, tracing in case of terrorism) can be drawn. There is high mobility across each other's border.

Indian arrivals over land were 1,298,708 in 2014 A.D but all these people travelling to Nepal cannot be assumed as tourist. This data make special reference that Indian travelling through land (Surpassing total tourist in Nepal) can be converted to potential tourist, particularly religious tourism. Thus, this data indicates high mobility and Indian visitors may have pilgrims purpose. So, the number of people visiting Nepal increases sharply if these data are considered. To back this data, the researcher conducted an informal talk with one official in Pashupatinath Temple (divine place in Nepal) who claims it to be more than 1 Million Indian visitors annually. Nepal does not maintain separate data for Indian visitors in Pashupatinath. So, these very numbers of visitors are possible only when Indian tourist visit this divine destination. It also indicates almost 1.5 million Indian visits Nepal (both air and overland), majority of them may have pilgrimage purpose. A huge research has to be conducted in Immigration office in major border (Nepal and India) for at least a month to know about real number of visitors across each other nation along with purpose.

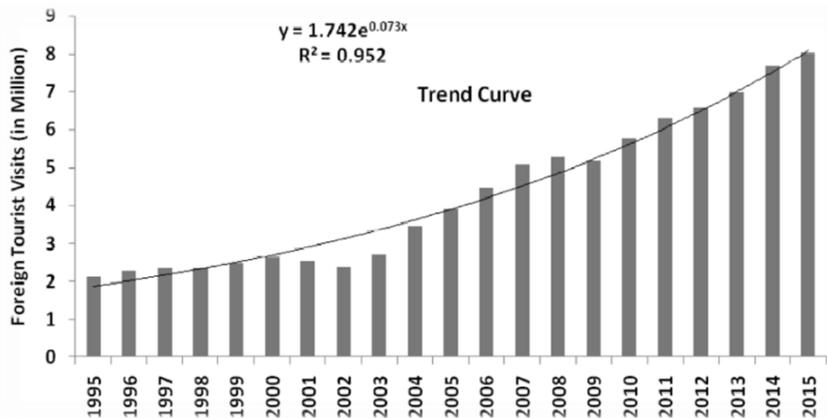
Table 6 on the other hand indicates large visitors from South Asian countries, about 28.98% out of Total visitors in India (2017) contributed as tourist. The three years' timeline data shows steady growth in the number of visitors with percentage contribution of south Asia increased to 28.98 with that of 23.86 in 2015. South Asian data are included as a part of this study because both of these nations belong to South Asia. A religious trail in South Asia can be explored and marketed in this reason. Nepal is a small tourism market for India due to its small population. However, India can always increases Nepalese Pilgrims as they have high regards for Dhams and Buddhist trial (Shiva Ji and Buddha). Both sides include massive numbers of religious trail in combination. One country cannot think of complete religious circuit without other. So this relation is purely symbiotic. If the data in borders and are well maintained, the number of visitors' increases and official can find the purpose of visit alongside. Thus, estimation of pilgrimage mobility with data entry process can be well predicted.

**Table 6: Total Number South Asian visitors to India**

SAARC	Visitors (year wise)		
	2015	2016	2017
<b>South Asia</b>			
Afghanistan	114406	123330	149176
Bangladesh	1133879	1380409	2156557
Bhutan	19084	20940	25267
Maldives	68907	67457	66150
<b>Nepal</b>	154720	161097	<b>164018</b>
Pakistan	124924	104720	44266
Sri Lanka	299513	297418	303590
<b>Total (South Asia)</b>	<b>1915433</b>	<b>2155371</b>	<b>2909024</b>
<b>Worldwide Visitors</b>	<b>8027133</b>	<b>8804411</b>	<b>10035803</b>
<b>%contribution by South Asia</b>	<b>23.86</b>	<b>24.48</b>	<b>28.98</b>

*Source: Bureau of Immigration, 2018*

Exploring the facts of an India, based on total numbers of visitor since 1995 to 2015 in Fig 2, the data fitted to exponential trend curve of R-square valued 0.952 indicating growth in tourism sector. The is a sharp increase in number of tourist visiting India from 2.12 million in 1995 to 8.03 million in 2015.



*Fig 2: Trend Curve for Total Visitors in India, 1995-2015*

## 5- Conclusions and Recommendations

The study indicates high pilgrimage mobility between these two nations with potential religious tourism. There are high inter connectivity and inter relationship among the pilgrimage tourist which is indicated by common values, cultural association, rituals and rites. Mobility among pilgrims can boost the tourism industry if every circuit (Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage) in Nepal and India is promoted as pilgrims' destination. There is more advantage to Nepal than to India as it has huge population. But the results until 2017 shows both countries have almost same number of travelers. If mobility data are more accurately maintained at the borders, exact pilgrims visitors can be assessed. Data indicates enough pilgrimage tour potentials by both nations; but a proper data entry system has to be started as there are huge flows in an open boarder. Thus, proper statistics has to be maintained to understand religious mobility and their exact contribution towards economy. Some recommendations for India and Nepal are as follow.

- Governments from both the countries during their bilateral talks should raise issues over pilgrims' tour on making it more effective and smooth. The continuous improvement of religious monument sites and free flow trial will boost religious tourism among the citizens from both nations.
- Frequent promotion campaign from both side have be held to make people aware about Buddhist and Hindu sites. For example, pilgrimage tour carnival can be held on alternatively in each nation once a year.
- High level interventions to conduct visitors exchange program can be initiated at Prime Minister Level.
- Hindu and Buddhist circuit have high potential religious tour but it need to be harnessed with all infrastructure facilities. India and Nepal share common beliefs, thoughts, culture and values with interconnectivity and complement. Thus, joint packages and pilgrims exchange are to be encouraged between two countries.
- Promoting religious destinations on government, state and people level through various exchange programs will help in identifying the root level problems.

- Conducting high level meetings to address proper data entry at borders. If possible a high level commission has to be formed to address free flow movements of people with proper data entry system. It can also address issues related to infrastructure, routes and security.
- Both governments and private sectors have to work hand in hand to maximized benefits and mitigate problems. This will strengthen public-private model for tourism development.
- Both countries should address innovative tours packages like “Trail along Buddhism for Peace”. In order to create novel product, both parties talk between Nepal and India has to be held. It can be G2G, B2B or any model.
- India and Nepal should hold both parties talk every six month for the betterment of pilgrimage tourism.
- Enhancements of road connectivity in Indo-Nepal border have to be improved to influencing religious mobility.

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