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## Buddhist Pilgrimage in Bihar India: A Tourism Policy Perspective

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# Buddhist Pilgrimage in Bihar India: A Tourism Policy Perspective

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Tourism policies formulated and implemented by the union and state governments of India and Bihar respectively, over the past five decades, have played a significant role in attracting religious tourists to the Buddhist sites in Bihar from all across the world. This exploratory research is a historiographical narrative of Buddhist tourism in view of tourism development policies and plans. The study finds that favourable and effective policies have increased domestic and foreign tourism in India, especially international Buddhist pilgrimage to Bihar. However, the state of Bihar still needs better policies and marketing to promote Buddhist tourism. The paper explores the overlooked role of government tourism development policies in promoting spiritual and religious tourism in India, in addition to chronicling the development of tourism in Bihar. The study paves the path for further research into a potential tourism resource that the state of Bihar possesses but has not been able to fully realise. This case study is one of very few attempts to relate the role of policies in the development of tourism in South Asia.

**Key Words:** tourism policy, Buddhist pilgrimage, Bihar, Indian tourism

## Introduction

India is arguably one of the largest treasure houses for tourism because of its size, culture, and history. With a history spanning more than 5,000 years and a rich heritage, along with a colourful and varied landscape encompassing the Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south, India's potential as a tourist destination is vast (Bhattacharya & Narayan, 2005). It is however, remarkable to note that the growth of tourism and visitor numbers in India, over the past half a century, has not reflected the bounty of tourism resources India possess. In recent years, there has been a significant improvement in the scenario and India climbed to 26<sup>th</sup> place in international tourist traffic numbers, with encouraging numbers as per the latest Government of India statistics.

In 2017, India's Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) grew by 14%, taking tourist arrival numbers to over 15 million (non-resident Indians). FTAs for 2016 were 8.89 million with is close to ten percent of a growth rate. The Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism in 2017 stood at US \$27.31 million (a growth rate of 19.1%) compared to a 2015 FEE of US \$21.07 million (4.1% growth over 2014). Domestic tourism continues to be an important contributor to the sector. According to the Ministry of Tourism, 1,652 million

tourists travelled within India in 2017, compared to 1,283 million in 2014. That represents 11.63% growth over 2014 (<http://tourism.gov.in>). Although encouraging, these numbers are low when compared to international tourism rates, as governments around the world compete for foreign exchange from tourism to boost revenues. Table 1 lists the top five tourist-receiving countries in comparison to India.

India is a vast country with many fascinating corners that have remained underexplored as tourist destinations. One of these great assets is India's diverse and unique spiritual heritage. The growing

Table 1 : Top Five Tourist Receiving Countries and India		
Country	1995	2017
France	60,033.00	86,861.00
Spain	34,920.00	81,786.00
United States of America	43,318.00	76,941.00
China	20,034.00	60,740.00
Italy	31,052.00	58,253.00
India	2,124.00	15,543.00
Source: <a href="https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL">https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL</a>		

interest in spiritualism among western tourists makes this aspect of India a major potential draw. Interest in Buddhism is already a significant reason for international tourism in Thailand, Japan, and China, and India appears poised to tap into the general growth in tourism motivated by an interest in spiritualism.

Bihar, a state of India located in the northern part of country and bordering Nepal, is known for its rich religious and cultural heritage and has attracted international tourists for thousands of years. Historical sites such as Rajgir and Bodhgaya are important Buddhist centres with immense potential to attract global tourists, but the government has made minimal efforts to promote these cities as spiritual tourism destinations. As a result, Bihar is mainly viewed as a place of pilgrimage rather than a tourism destination (Khan & Udai, 2005). This paper focuses on tourism in Bihar and how governmental tourism policies at different points in time have impacted tourism to Buddhist sites in Bihar.

## Literature Review

### *Interest in Buddhism among international tourists*

With a more than a 2,500-year history, Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world and one of the most prominent in the East. Lord Buddha was born in Lumbini (now Nepal) and lived most of his life in what is now India. His teachings, however, spread far beyond this region into much of Asia. Today's followers of Buddhism are spread out across China, Thailand, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia, Korea, Bhutan, India, and beyond. Buddhism also has many followers in Western countries (Nyaupane, Timothy & Poudel, 2015). The study / practice of Buddhism is the study of one's own self and the nature of one's own mind. Instead of focusing on a supreme being, Buddhism emphasises the practical matters of how to lead one's life, how to integrate the mind and body, and how to maintain a peaceful and healthy routine. In fact, Buddhism may not necessarily be a religion in the usual sense of the term: the lamas (High Priest or chief of Buddhism) consider Buddhist teachings to belong more to the realm of philosophy, science, or psychology than religion (Yeshe, 1998). Buddhism teaches the art of living. Tourists from around the world who are interested in different aspects of Buddhism and its teachings about meditation, peace and non-violence, and spirituality are often drawn to Buddhist centres (Choe *et al.*, 2015).

Many Buddhists place great value upon pilgrimages to places that the Buddha visited, stayed or meditated in, during his lifetime. These pilgrimages can serve as a means of awakening positive mental states in those practising the Buddhist faith and philosophy (Singh, 2002). Hall (2006) outlines a four-tier hierarchy of significance for Buddhist religious places and finds that most of these are located in India. It is therefore not surprising that many followers of Buddhism wish to travel to India to visit these sites.

### ***Buddhist tourism in India with special reference to Bihar***

Buddhism is practised more in southern and south-eastern Asia than it is in India, but, as the birthplace of Buddhism, India is essential to its heritage.

*The core pilgrimage places associated with the Buddha's life are all located in the northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, except Lumbini, which is in Nepal. In ancient times, this area was called Puratthima (Eastern Tract), but today it is referred to as the Buddhist Circuit (Hall, 2006:175).*

In addition to the Buddhist Circuit, there are other pilgrimage sites in India where the union of Hinduism and Buddhism has created a distinct architectural and cultural landscape (Joshi, 2015). One such place that is of significance to this study is Gaya.

*The name Gaya is derived from a demon-king, Gayasura, who by his arduous austerity and deep meditation pleased the gods and was blessed resulting in the formation of a very powerful and sacred location. It was this fame that attracted the Buddha to come and perform meditation here (Singh, 2011:233).*

International attention to India's Buddhist sites began with the discoveries and studies of British archaeologists in the pre-independence period. After independence in 1947, the Indian government viewed these sites as a useful means of building strong political relationships with East and Southeast Asian countries. Several of these countries contributed to the construction of Buddhist monasteries, 'stupas', and other religious structures at Buddhist sites in India (Kumar, 2006 in Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2006; Agrawal *et al.*, 2010). The Indian government and the Department of Tourism have created several task forces to look into the development and augmentation of several Buddhist sites in India: the 'Mahabodhi' Temple Complex in Gaya (where Buddha attained enlightenment), Sarnath (where he delivered his first sermon), and Kushinagar (where he achieved salvation) (see Figure 1(a-c)) as

**Figure 1(a) Mahabodhi Temple in Gaya**

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Mahabodhitemple.jpg>

**Figure 1(b) Sarnath Temple**

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/A\\_Buddhist\\_temple\\_at\\_Sarnath.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/A_Buddhist_temple_at_Sarnath.jpg)

**Figure 1(c) Stupa Ruins in Kushinagar**

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Stupa\\_ruins\\_in\\_Kushinagar.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Stupa_ruins_in_Kushinagar.jpg)

well as over seventy-five other Buddhist sites spread across the country. Kant (2009) even believes that India has the potential to be the Mecca for Buddhist tourists, especially for those from neighbouring Southeast Asian countries.

The state of Bihar is the most popular destination for Buddhist tourism in India. Bodhgaya, Rajgir, and Nalanda are the major destinations in Bihar that attract tourists who want to explore Buddhist spiritualism through the ancient architectural relics located throughout the state. Tourists usually visit the main sites of the Buddhist Circuit (Sarnath, Bodhgaya, Kushinagar, and Kapilvastu – all located in India) and Lumbini (the birthplace of Lord Buddha, now in Nepal). Sarnath and Bodhgaya draw the largest number of domestic tourists, while international tourists tend to stay longer and cover the whole circuit.

*Nowhere is the concentration of world Buddhism more apparent than in the town of Bodhgaya in southern Bihar. Regarded as the 'navel of the earth' it was here that Siddhartha Gautam took refuge under the canopy of a large peepal tree and became enlightened about 2,550 years ago (Agrawal et al., 2010:480).*

The popularity of Bihar is growing year on year, for example, the foreign tourist inflow increased by 8.3% in 2014 (Krishna et al., 2014). One of the main attractions in Bihar for practitioners of Buddhism and scholars studying the religion is the city of Bodhgaya, which features a 19.5m high sculpture (Figure 2) of Lord Buddha (Geary, 2008). The significance of the

many sites in Bihar that relate directly to Lord Buddha's life journey is underlined in Skakya Muni's 'Mahaparinirvana Sutra':

*After I am no more, O Ananda! Men of belief will visit the place with faith, curiosity and devotion ... Lumbini, the place where I was born; Bodhgaya, where I attained*

**19.507m tall Great Buddha statue in Bodhgaya**

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/17/Bodh\\_Gaya\\_-\\_Buddha\\_Statue\\_-\\_Front\\_View\\_%28289224970905%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/17/Bodh_Gaya_-_Buddha_Statue_-_Front_View_%28289224970905%29.jpg)



*enlightenment; Sarnath, where I gave the first sermon; and Kushinagar where I shall pass into Mahaparinirvana ... The path to ultimate peace is spiritual discipline (Maha-parinibbana Sutta; Sakya 2009 pp. 59-60).*

### **Policy and its implications for tourism**

*'Tourism policy can be defined as a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, and development/promotion objectives and strategies that provide a framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting long-term tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003:413).*

Studying the government's tourism policies for a particular region is an essential step in following the development of tourism in that area. Tourism policy provides the overall direction to a country's tourism development (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003). Tourism achieves its perceived success in a country within a structured policy framework and flourishes with the support of policy and planning initiatives taken by governments (Upadhya, 2016).

According to Hall (2008), policies are studied for three main reasons: to be aware of the influence of policy decisions and their impacts; to offer feedback on practical issues involving the policy process and any problems with the policy and; to identify successful aspects of the policy and planning process. Tourism policy should present a set of guidelines, combined with planning goals, and chart a course of action for meaningful decision-making. Most tourism policies throughout the world are fragmented, poorly defined, and difficult to understand.

*Public policy is both a process and a product – the decision-making process and the product of that process [Today, there is recognition that] Policy should serve not only the government, but also the public's interest in tourism. Policy, when properly applied, is a vehicle for a government to direct and stimulate the tourism industry (Edgell et al., 2008:12).*

Tourism is a sector in relation to which the state and its various public institutions act, create policies, usher marketing initiatives and contract various development projects (Aukland & Knut, 2018). Governments throughout the world understand the role of tourism in economic development. As Kumral and Önder have emphasized (2009), the tourism industry is one of the main drivers of the creative economy and has played

an increasingly important role in growth policies at national and regional level. New tourism policies are emerging to increase local competitiveness and promote quality of experience and innovative tourism services.

A significant and path-making article by Fayos-Sola (1996) identifies three generations of tourism policy:

First-generation policies focused on increasing the volume of activity in order to maximize income. (These policies are characterized as 'boosterism'.)

Second-generation policies attempted to expand tourism as an industry through subsidies, promotion, and regulation (spatial planning, environmental regulation).

Third-generation policies aimed to improve competitiveness through increased quality and efficiency in service delivery.

Despite these generations of policy measures, however, successful tourism requires more than governmental tourism policies. For tourism to be sustainable, planning and implementation efforts must be effective, and the success of such efforts is dependent on the co-operation of many players. This need for co-operation is due to the global, multi-sectoral nature of tourism and the socio-political complexities involved (Burns, 2004).

### **Tourism policy in India**

The British government in India, before independence, gave little consideration to India's tourism industry, and the Indian government only began to explore how to develop tourism starting in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

*The relative weakness of India's international tourism sector is, perhaps surprising, given the diverse attractions of the country, although most commentators point to haphazard tourism development policies and poor infrastructure as significant barriers. Nevertheless, since the 1960s, the country has become popular amongst Western visitors seeking some form of spiritual experience (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005:165).*

Singh (2002) has argued that India designed its first tourism plans to fit within a five-year time frame as commonly designated for national planning and policy activities. These tourism plans commenced as early as 1951, when the first *Five Year Plan* (FYP), for 1951–55, was initiated. Little came of this first plan, and the second *Five Year Plan* was similarly unproductive.

*The only noteworthy benchmark in the history of Indian tourism planning occurred in 1966, the last year of the third FYP, when the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) was established. The intention was that it should play a crucial, strategic and catalytic role in the development of tourism by setting up an elaborate infrastructure for tourist services in accommodation, travel, conferences and even shopping (Singh, 2002:143).*

The first effective tourism policy in India was not declared until 1982. It outlined development objectives and provided an action plan based on tourism circuits, deftly interweaving the concept of integrated planning into the country's tourism policy by identifying and developing centres of single or multiple attractions.

The concept of tourism circuits was readily absorbed by the State Tourism Development Corporation (STDC), which immediately identified centres with similar levels of resource under the broad categories of wildlife, history, religion, culture, adventure, and nature. In most cases, the circuits were located within a single state; however, in exceptional cases a circuit was shared by two or more states. The latter circumstances describe the Buddhist circuit, which includes sites related to the life of Buddha, most of which are located in the northern states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

By the time of the *Eighth FYP*, for 1992-1997, a series of new ideas were introduced, and planners recognised the importance of domestic tourism for the first time. Besides thematic tourist circuits, the plan for this period proposed intensive development of all-inclusive Special Tourist Areas (STAs). In addition, a 'tourism synergy program' was prepared in 1993 that was subsequently modified and presented for consideration by the private sector and state governments in 1996 as the *National Strategy for the Development of Tourism*. This was subsequently discussed at a conference of state governments in 1997. The 1997 policy emphasised the vitality of domestic tourism, the value of international tourism as a global force for peace, and the need to obtain a balance of inbound and outbound tourism. This policy clarified the intention of making tourism a national priority, and tourism was added to the concurrent list of India's constitution that specified where both the central and state governments could legislate.

It took another two decades for a new tourism policy to be declared. The Indian tourism policy of 2002 was a logical extension of the 1982 policy. Its objectives included systematic development of tourism in India,

positioning the industry as a major engine of economic growth, and harnessing its direct and multiplier effects for employment and poverty eradication in an environmentally sustainable manner. In general the 2002 policy attempted to position India as a global brand so that it could take advantage of the growing global travel trade and the vast untapped potential of India as a destination. The policy acknowledged the critical role of the private sector, with government working as a pro-active facilitator and catalyst. A major goal of the policy was to create and develop – in partnership with states, the private sector, and agencies – integrated tourism circuits based on India's unique civilisation, heritage, and culture. The stated aim of this policy was to ensure that by visiting India, tourists would find themselves physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched, and spiritually elevated after '[feeling] India from within' ([www.tourismofindia.com](http://www.tourismofindia.com)). In continuation of its efforts to popularise the circuits, the ministry of tourism also launched significant media campaigns aimed at tapping into source markets in East Asia, including Japan, as part of the 'Look East Policy' to get greater number of tourists with special interest in Buddhist sites (Geary, 2018).

India's tourist industry is in a much different position today than it was in the early sixties, and as the data presented above in the introduction indicate, a series of developmental policies have had a positive impact on tourism. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. One major concern over the growth in tourism has to do with the overall development of facilities, infrastructure, and sanitation. The present government's initiative of 'Swachh Bharat' (clean India) is intended as a significant step towards addressing this concern.

Table 2 shows the planned outlay for tourism in India during the twelve five-year plans. As is evident from the data, allocation of resources grew substantially during the tenth five-year plan, and this growth has been reflected in successive plans as well.

In recent times, spiritual tourism has increased significantly because of the heightened interest among foreign tourists, particularly in Buddhism. The Ministry of Tourism launched the *Strategy for Integrated Tourism Development of the Buddhist Circuit* in Bihar as well as Uttar Pradesh under a project investing in the Buddhist Circuit (Geary, 2014). Bihar's state government has recognised the Buddhist Circuit (i.e. Bodhgaya — Rajgir — Nalanda — Patna — Vaishali — Lauriya Nandangarh — Kesariya —

**Table 2 : Planned Outlays for Tourism (India)**

Five-Year Plan	Five-Year Plan Time Period	Plan Allocation (in Rupees)
1st	1951–1956	0.00
2nd	1956–1961	33.638 million
3rd	1961–1966	80 million
	1966–1967*	5.85 million
	1967–1968* 1968–1969*	8.765 million 18.381 million
4th	1969–1974	360 million
5th	1974–1979	1330 million
6th	1980–1985	1874.60 million
7th	1985–1990	3261.60 million
	1990–1991	830 million
	1991–1992	900 million
8th	1992–1997	7736.20 million
9th	1997–2002	7937.50 million
10th	2002–2007**	29000 million
11th	2007–2012***	51560 million
12 <sup>th</sup>	2012–2017***	160000 million

**Sources:** Khan *et al.*, 2014. 'Tourism Development in India under Government Five Year Plans'. International Journal of Research, 1(3), pp. 128;

Five Year Plans, Government of India;

\*Indian Tourism: Economic Planning & Statistics;

\*\*Annual Report, 2002–2003, Department of Tourism, Government of India;

\*\*\*Annual Report, 2011–2012, Department of Tourism, Government of India;

\*\*\*\*Report of the Working Group on Tourism, 12th Five Year Plan (2012–2017), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

\*\*\*\*<http://www.travelbizmonitor.com/Ministry/tourism-outlay-to-increase-threefold-in-12th-five-year-plan-period-17729>

Vikramsila) in order to develop necessary facilities for the tourists. Since Bihar has come to be known as the home of Buddhism, the government of the state is trying to formulate different marketing strategies and policies to promote Buddhist heritage. This may help the government to enhance and improve the tourist experience in the pilgrimage sites associated with Buddhism (Sinha & Kumar, 2012). One such proposal developed by the Bihar government is the creation of a theme park in Rajgir, near the Buddhist stupa. The Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation (BSTDC) also offers a three-day Buddhist tour starting from the state's capital, Patna.

### ***Bihar tourism policy***

In the state of Bihar, tourism has recently begun to receive unprecedented attention from policymakers. In 2009, the Bihar government presented its tourism policies with the aim of accelerating the growth of tourism in the state and improving the state's economy. Policies aimed in particular at developing the Buddhist circuit in the state (Lemos *et al.*, 2012). The state's objectives were as follows:

To make tourism a top priority for the state

To promote the state for religious, cultural, and wellness tourism

To improve the effectiveness of the industry for increased economic and social benefits

To ensure all the stakeholders participate in making the state a popular tourism destination

To implement an integrated communication strategy for the Tourism Awareness and Promotion Campaign

To offer exceptional services to international as well as domestic tourists

To improve the connectivity in the state

In order to achieve these objectives, the government formulated a number of strategies:

**Establishing a tourist security force:** The State government formulated strategies to hire security employees in order to offer tourist security services and foster a sense of security among travellers to any tourist destination.

**Formulating and enforcing plans for integrated marketing and developing certain identified circuits:** The Bihar government formulated a master plan comprising a 10-year planning phase and investment by both private and public sectors.

**Enhancing and improving catering as well as accommodation and recreational facilities:** The government launched an initiative to build budget as well as starred hotels in the identified tourist destinations of the state, with the aim of offering high-end services to domestic as well as international tourists. The government also encouraged the establishment of heritage hotels in the state by converting heritage mansions and buildings into hotels. It also launched the 'paying guest' scheme by identifying those houses that would contribute to tourism development. It may be of interest to note that the concept of paying guest is an important attempt to



involve the residents in offering authentic local accommodation and in the process earn from tourism activity. This also avoids any possible resentment amongst residents towards growing tourist numbers. The scheme involves enlisting good quality spare accommodation (en-suit room) in a local home to be rented for short duration stays by tourists.

**Enhancing transport and connectivity:** The government formulated strategies that would enhance transport and connectivity by linking tourist destinations to world-class roads. It also introduced specialised vehicles, special tourist trains with specific itineraries, and air taxi services for identified circuits (Medhekar & Haq, 2012).

**Expanding and improving tourism products:** The government also implemented policies to improve the infrastructure for some circuits (e.g. the Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist circuits) by devoting the resources needed to develop them according to international standards. It also took measures to develop new circuits (e.g. the Sufi, Ramayan, and Gandhi circuits). It also implemented policies to promote rural tourism, wellness tourism, and eco-tourism in the state.

**Strengthening and establishing institutions for human resource development:** The government implemented policies to establish hotel management institutes, trade and travel institutes, and food craft institutes in order to develop skills and training in the industry (Agrawal, 2015). Moreover, it took measures to train travel guides in foreign languages to facilitate communication with international tourists.

**Improving the international and domestic marketing of Buddhist destinations:** The Bihar government decided to implement an aggressive and competitive marketing strategy to promote Buddhist destinations in the region. The state undertook measures to differentiate itself from rival destinations and establish an ongoing and effective market representation in the tourism industry. It also planned to participate in international and domestic tourist events as a way of putting Bihar destinations on the tourism map (Agrawal *et al.*, 2010).

**Focus on regional and domestic tourism:** The state also considered developing packages in accordance with the tourism development corporations of nearby states to tap the potential of regional and domestic tourism in the state.

**Promoting crafts, arts, festivals, and delicacies of the state:** The government has implemented policies in order to promote various festivals as tourism products. Examples include the Chath Festival, the Sonepur Fair, the Rajgir Festival, and Saurat Sabha.

Figure 3 sums up the positive correlation between policy frameworks designed from time to time by the governments of India and Bihar and the growth of tourism in planning and visitation in India and Bihar.

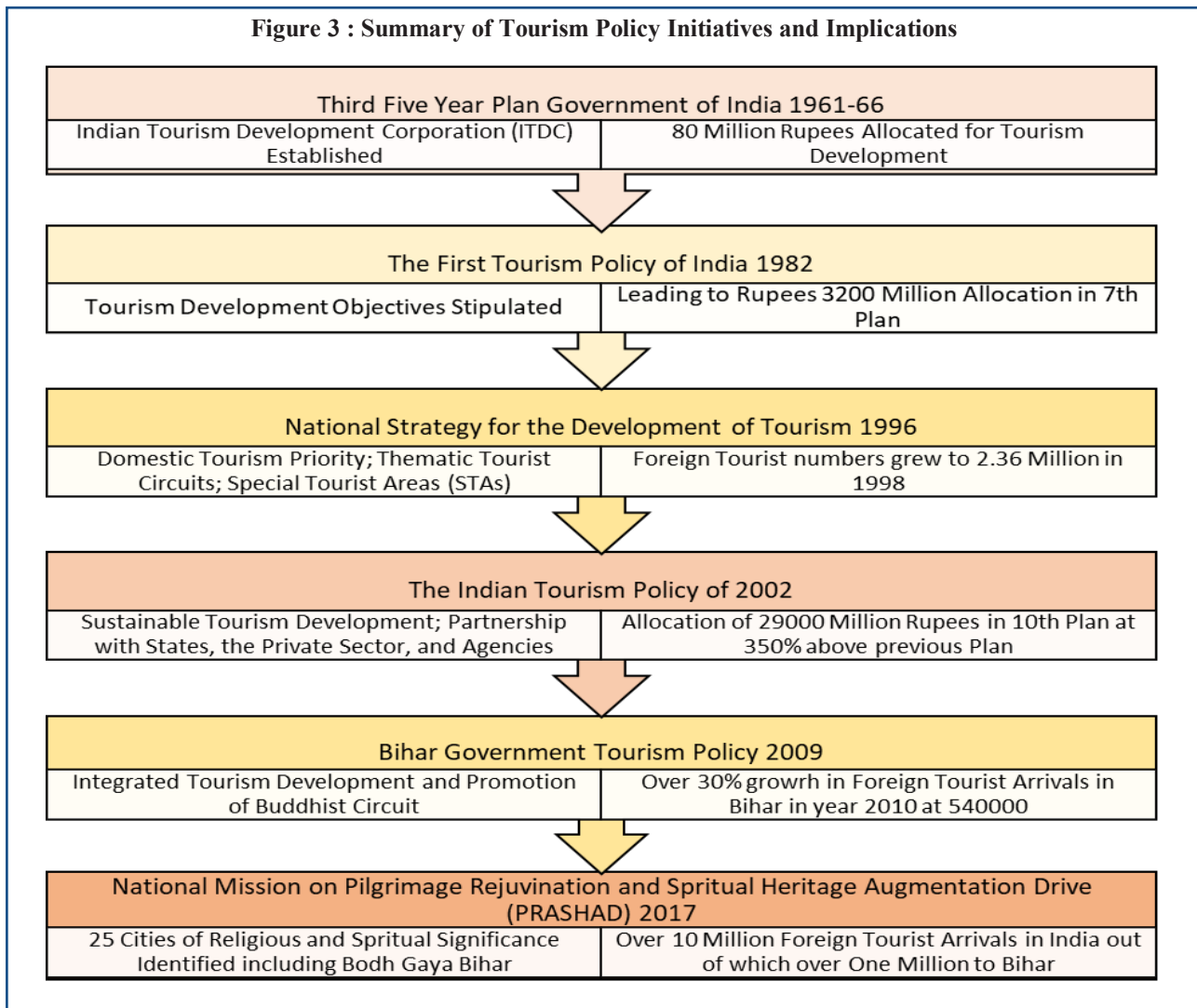
## Research Methodology

Being exploratory in nature this study examines questions about the policies related to Buddhist tourism in Bihar. Exploratory studies have been defined as investigations into problems or situations that provide insights to the researcher. This type of research is intended to fill in details where a small amount of information exists (WebFinance, 2016). As the topic of tourism policies and Buddhist tourism has not been researched substantially, an exploratory study will aid in outlining the major issues involved.

Labaree (2009) states that an exploratory design is appropriate for studying a problem in the absence of adequate research for reference or prediction of outcomes. The insights and familiarity gained from the exploratory study can then aid in later investigations of the research problem. Moreover, Team (2014) has suggested that exploratory research can provide rich quality information that will help identify issues that should be addressed in surveys and thereby significantly reduce a research project's level of bias. Exploratory research is a promising approach for tourism studies as a first stage in a sequential research process. Because the results of this stage are intended as the basis for future investigations, adequate measures should be taken to ensure that the results of the exploratory phase provide a sound platform for the subsequent stage (Mason *et al.*, 2010).

The present research is a case study of Buddhist tourism in Bihar. The justifications for using a case study as a research technique are well documented (Creswell, 2012). Case studies have often been viewed as useful tools for the preliminary, exploratory stage of a research project on the basis of which 'more structured' tools necessary such as surveys and experiments can be developed (Rowley, 2002). Being focused, case studies offer a very significant approach in qualitative research. Creswell (1998) provides some conceptual clarification by defining qualitative research as follows:



**Figure 3 : Summary of Tourism Policy Initiatives and Implications**

*Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting* (Creswell, 1998:15).

Qualitative research methods are recognised as a valuable tool in social sciences and in particular management studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and they have spilled over into applied social policy research (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) that this study has a focus on. This study is about 'tourism in Bihar' and how governmental tourism policies at different points in time have impacted tourism at Buddhist sites in the state. For the purpose of ensuring optimal effectiveness and utilisation these policies and procedures need to be reviewed periodically. The review helps in assessing the success or failure of the policy and encapsulates an overview of the operational deployment of these policies. The research that undertakes this role, in the

opinion of Ritchie & Spencer (1994) is applied policy research, leading the study to gather specific information that has the potential to create actionable outcomes. Within applied policy research, qualitative methods can answer a variety of questions. Ritchie and Spencer (1994) categorise these into four types: contextual, diagnostic, evaluative and strategic. These categories further elaborate the type of research questions that may be framed for deriving meaningful conclusions. The data set used for exploration may include non-textual data such as tables, pictures, audio and video recordings (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Table 3 displays the functions and aims of the four categories:

This study takes a cue from these categories and applies it to reach its conclusions. The 'introduction' section of the study sets up the context, while the 'literature review' section examines the existing knowledge and is akin to a diagnostic category; the 'analysis and discussion' section of the study explores and appraises the qualitative data available in the

**Table 3 : Applied Policy Research Categories**

Contextual	Identifying the form and nature of what exists
Diagnostic	Examining the reasons for, or causes of, what exists
Evaluative	Appraising the effectiveness of what exists
Strategic	Identifying new theories, policies and plans or actions
<i>Adapted from: - Srivastava A. &amp; Thomson S.B. (2009) Framework analysis: a qualitative methodology for applied policy research. Journal of Administration &amp; Governance 4(2), 72–79.</i>	

public domain in regard to the subject matter of this study, and falls in the evaluative category as per Ritchie and Spencer's categorisation, and finally the 'conclusion' section of the study identifies and accordingly suggests, a plan of action for the growth of religious tourism in Bihar.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Foreign tourists in India

There is a very pronounced focus on the development of tourism in India in the past decade. The rich cultural heritage of the nation has a lot to offer to the tourism phenomenon, and many unexplored destinations offer attractions not only to leisure tourists but also to those who would like to engage in spiritual tourism and scholarly pursuits (Jauhari, 2010). Indian pilgrimage sites that offer this spiritual experience, are a great attraction for travellers from within the country and outside and as Collins Kreiner (2018) would define, pilgrimage must be experienced in a holistic way, in a manner that encompasses both traditional religious pilgrimage and modern secular journeys; the Buddhist sites of Bihar appear quite close to this comprehensive experience. Table 4 illustrates the number of international tourists visiting India from 1998–2017:

As Table 4 indicates, international tourism in India increased from 2.36 million in the year 1998 to 10.04 million in 2017 (including non-resident Indians <http://tourism.gov.in/sites>); the number of foreign tourists has been rising almost every year, with only a few exceptions. For example, India experienced negative growth in 2009 at 2.2% due to terrorism, the global financial crisis, H1N1 influenza, and other issues impacting the economy. In 2010 the growth rate increased substantially, by 8.1%, with an inflow of 5.78 million international tourists (Annual Report, 2010). It can be inferred that favourable tourism policies and infrastructural developments have played a significant role in the gradual increase in the number of foreign tourists arriving in India.

To understand the tourism picture for the different regions of the country, we need to break down the visits of foreign tourists by state and union territory. Table 5 considers the top ten states and union territories in India for receipt of foreign tourists, categorising each as a percentage of the overall visits by foreign tourists in 2017. As illustrated, in 2017, Bihar was ranked ninth among Indian states with a 4% share of foreign tourist visitors to India. Despite its many world-renowned Buddhist pilgrimage sites, it

**Table 4 : Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India, 1998–2017**

Year	FTAs in India (in millions)	Percentage (%) change over previous year
1998	2.36	-0.7
1999	2.48	5.2
2000	2.65	6.7
2001	2.54	-4.2
2002	2.38	-6.0
2003	2.73	14.3
2004	3.46	26.8
2005	3.92	13.3
2006	4.45	13.5
2007	5.08	14.3
2008	5.28	4.0
2009	5.17	-2.2
2010	5.78	11.8
2011	6.31	9.2
2012	6.58	4.3
2013	6.97	5.9
2014	7.68	10.2
2015	8.03	4.5
2016	8.80	9.7
2017	10.04	14

Source: India Tourism Statistics 2018 <http://tourism.gov.in/>

**Table 5 : Share of Top 10 States/UTs of India in Number of Foreign Tourist Visits in 2017**

Rank	State/UT	Foreign Tourist Visits in 2017	
		Number	Percentage Share (%)
1	Maharashtra	5078514	18.9
2	Tamil Nadu	4860455	18.1
3	Uttar Pradesh	3556204	13.2
4	Delhi	2740502	10.2
5	Rajasthan	1609963	6.0
6	West Bengal	1574915	5.9
7	Punjab	1108635	4.1
8	Kerala	1091870	4.0
<b>9</b>	<b>Bihar</b>	<b>1082705</b>	<b>4.0</b>
10	Goa	842220	3.1
	Total of Top 10	23545983	87.6
	Others	3340655	12.4
	Total	26886638	100.0

Source: India Tourism Statistics at a Glance 2018 <http://tourism.gov.in/sites/>

attracted just over a million foreign tourists in that year. That number, along with tourism to Buddhist sites in general, is expected to rise in the future as a result of the Ministry of Tourism's Proactive Promotion campaign. For example, the ministry has developed the tourism capacity of the ancient city of Gaya, making it a Buddhist destination for visitors from Southeast Asian nations. Among 24 sanctioned projects in the state for developing Buddhist circuits, four are complete and 20 are underway (Ministry of Tourism, India, 2016). Travel agency websites, electronic media campaigns, travel publications, and the official website of the Ministry of Tourism all offer information about visiting the area and serve as a means of attracting foreign tourists to the state's Buddhist circuit.

#### *Tourism destinations for foreign tourists in Bihar*

In order to understand the attractiveness of Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Bihar, the statistics of foreign tourists' visits to different locations in the state must be examined. The data released by the government of Bihar shows the number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting different destinations in 2018 and it is evident from this, that the largest proportions of foreign tourists to Bihar visit Gaya, Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda and Vaishali (these are the major Buddhist tourism destinations). For example, 92.98% of all foreign tourists in Bihar went to these five destinations in 2018 ([www.bihartourism.gov.in/data/Tourist\\_Data/](http://www.bihartourism.gov.in/data/Tourist_Data/)).

The number of foreign tourists visiting Bihar has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 39.6% between 2004 and 2018 as compared to the CAGR of 8.09% for the whole of India ([www.bihartourism.gov.in](http://www.bihartourism.gov.in)). These figures illustrate the immense potential of Buddhist tourism in Bihar and suggests the possibility of tapping into that potential with the right set of tourism policies at state and national levels.

#### *Analysis*

The statistical data and available literature (web-links of major data sources are listed in the reference section of this paper) suggest that the development and promotion of the previously untapped potential of tourist destinations in the country have significantly increased India's foreign and domestic tourism. Based upon the literature review and statistical analysis, a SWOT analysis has been employed (Table 6) to crystalize the issues involved in the development of tourism in Bihar, such that it can prove to be a beacon for the future formulation of policies:

In view of the discussion and the SWOT grid, it is evident that the state of Bihar has not fully realised the vast potential of growing demand for Buddhist tourism. Global travellers are keen to visit the pilgrim centres that carry significant religious value for the followers of Buddhism. Concerted efforts to improve upon the infrastructural limitations and other areas



**Table 6 : SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bihar comprises a rich inventory of high-end tourism services with natural resources and a glorious cultural heritage.</li> <li>2. Buddhist religious places are spread across the state. Bodhgaya, where Buddha gained supreme illumination, is the most prominent Buddhist pilgrimage site in Bihar.</li> <li>3. Other Buddhist and Jain pilgrimage sites, including Rajgir, Nalanda, and Vaishali, also attract large numbers of foreign tourists.</li> <li>4. The Gautam Buddha Sanctuary, Rajgir Sanctuary, and other wildlife and bird sanctuaries also attract domestic and overseas tourists.</li> <li>6. Heritage monuments in Bihar are located in Vikramsila, Nalanda, and Kumrahar.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issues of safety and security for tourists affect the image of the state of Bihar.</li> <li>2. Tourism suffers from lack of infrastructure (e.g. public conveniences, transportation facilities, etc.).</li> <li>3. Tourism suffers from a lack of concerted marketing efforts.</li> <li>4. Tourism suffers from lack of awareness and publicity among domestic tourists.</li> <li>5. Tourism suffers from lack of professional training services.</li> <li>6. The four major rivers in Bihar which make 16.5% of its area are prone to flood.</li> </ol>
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop heritage tourism and promote religious places, historical places, forts, and archaeological sites.</li> <li>2. Promote cultural tourism related to festivals and fairs.</li> <li>3. Encourage health tourism by promoting spring sites that offer health and wellness features such as yoga.</li> <li>4. Improve safety and security along with increased tourism infrastructure.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bihar stands to lose tourism to other competitive Buddhist circuits (e.g. neighbouring ones in Uttar Pradesh and Nepal).</li> <li>2. Neighbouring international tourist destinations such as Thailand and newly opened Myanmar may compete for the same visitors.</li> <li>3. Lack of awareness among international and national travellers may allow Bihar's potential as a tourist destination to remain untapped.</li> </ol>

identified in the analysis of weaknesses, and to tap the listed opportunities, will certainly help mitigate the threats and further improve the flow of pilgrims leading to increased foreign earnings and in the process further improve the image of the destination.

### Conclusion

This paper has focused on the impact of tourism policies framed by the governments of India and the state of Bihar on pilgrimage to the Buddhist tourism sites in Bihar. A major take-away of this study is establishing a positive relationship between periodical policy pushes and incremental growth in tourist numbers. It can be observed from the data, analysis and the ensuing discussion that, as and when a new policy framework is implemented it brings about an increase in tourist numbers, however, there are sceptical viewpoints that suggest that policy frameworks are not well-conceived and applied sufficiently in most pilgrimage towns, which are sometimes left to themselves when it comes to management of religious tourism in India (Shinde 2018).

Still, the positives from a well-conceived policy framework surely outweigh any negatives and offer a very significant co-relation that can guide policy makers / destination managers and the tourism

industries in synchronising their efforts for identifying areas of improvement, formulating effective policies and implementing the policies to reap better results.

There is a potent threat posed by other Buddhist destinations in relation to visitation to India. However, a more focused and action-oriented strategy may further aid in developing the outlying infrastructure and circuits around the Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Considering in the policy framework, the three key elements of capacity building, training entrepreneurs, and infrastructure development, will go a long way in reinforcing the main objective of attracting international tourists to India and to Bihar in particular (Rasul & Manandhar, 2009). The increase in tourist inflow to the Buddhist tourism destinations in Bihar appears to be linked to favourable tourism policies affecting the development of tourism-related infrastructure.

This exploratory study has its own limitations. Firstly, the number of domestic and overseas tourist arrivals in Bihar is assumed to consist primarily of tourists visiting for Buddhist pilgrimage, however, tourists might also be visiting Bihar for leisure, business, or family reunions (Bihar has a very large diaspora settled around the globe). Secondly, the study has not included the industry perspective in its discussions since it

would have taken a long time to do any representative research, and this was not the focus of the paper. The industry outlook would add more value to future studies carrying forward from the discussions of this study. Lastly, the paper only considered secondary sources of information and some of the information gathered may be biased or out of date.

Future studies on the impact of tourism policies on tourist inflows should be conducted on empirical data analysis collected from samples of tourists visiting the state. Such primary data can be used to investigate the reasons for tourism in the chosen destinations and to gauge the impacts of central and state governmental tourism policies, beyond the review presented here, as a confirmatory study. Such an attempt to investigate the impact of tourism policies implemented by the Bihar and national government in order to promote international and domestic Buddhist tourism would be productive as it would bring out another dimension of the effectiveness of policies in promoting religious and spiritual tourism.

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