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Perspectives on Holy Springs as a Religious Tourism Resource: a Comparative Study of the Baltic States and India

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Holy springs played an immense role in religious tourism globally over centuries. It is widely believed that visiting holy springs as part of religious practice symbolises the washing away of sins and enhances ones' health condition and well-being. Both in India and the Baltic States, a significant number of holy springs have various religious significances. However, over a period of time, due to changes in socio-cultural and political conditions, the use of springs for religious purposes and health reasons has also changed. The aim of this article is to analyse the change in the use of holy springs as religious tourism resources in India and the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). Both semi-structured interviews and content analysis are used as qualitative research approaches in the study. Semi-structured interviews in India and the Baltic States were undertaken with both tourists and spring management authorities on the motivations, changing aspects of the use of water springs, and possible solutions for the sustainable use of springs. The content analysis included written records, blogs, and social media sites, to establish historical perspectives on the use of water springs. In the conclusion, the authors provide suggestions for alternative ways of promoting spring tourism at religious sites.

Key Words: holy springs, religious tourism, water spring tourism, India, Baltic States

Introduction

There are several motives for people to participate in pilgrimage and religious tourism, which is considered one of the oldest forms of tourism, growing globally (Alecu, 2010). An inventory of UNESCO World Heritage sites shows that about 20 percent of the list have a religious or spiritual connections (UNESCO, 2022). In a report published by International Union for Nature titled *Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers*, sacred natural sites are defined as 'areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities' (Wild & Valentine, 2008). People with and without religious motives inhabit or visit places that are considered to be sacred such as rivers, lakes, streams, springs, and ancient wells (Altman 2002; Bikse & Gavinolla, 2022). In almost all religions, across the globe, holy water is associated with rituals and activities, it is considered to have miraculous and healing powers (Alley 2002) and is also an essential aspect of spiritual life (Coltelli, 1996). Pilgrims and tourists use holy water

for drinking, wetting lips, dipping or sprinkling on persons, and so on (Kirschner *et al.*, 2012).

Many religious sites and water springs are attractive to tourists due to increased awareness, promotion, and innovation in the development of packaged tours (Bikse & Gavinolla, 2022). However, change in socioeconomic conditions and demographics are impacting the tourism industry directly leading to changes in the practice and management of tourism services (Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Giușcă *et al.*, 2018). Increased attention and growth of domestic and international tourism have a direct impact on destinations' resources, and this includes holy spring destinations (Bikse & Gavinolla, 2021). Increased use of springs for recreational purposes (Akhmedenov, 2020), the issue of over-tourism, the development of infrastructure, the impact of changing climatic conditions, and contamination of water are widely evident in several places of Latvia and India (Bikse & Gavinolla, 2021).

Several studies examine various aspects of the use of spring water in tourism in general (Lee & King, 2009). However, scientific research on spring water for religious or not religious purposes in tourism, and most importantly a comparative study that provides perspectives on the use of springs in different regions of the world is significantly missing.

The objective of the current study is to analyse changing patterns in the use of holy springs as religious tourism resources in India and the Baltic States. The Baltic States are a unique region where the living Baltic nations, Latvians and Lithuanians, as well as the Finno-Ugric peoples, the Estonians, and the Livs, have preserved a lot of their pre-Christian traditions. This links closely with the preservation of ancient practices in India and in fact, the language and traditions of the Baltic nations have many similarities with Sanskrit (Chatterji, 1968), adding further to the uniqueness of this study.

The study outcomes can help the industry and scholars to better understand the similarities and differences in the use of springs as a tourism resource. The study results can improve the sustainable management and promotion of holy spring sites both for domestic and international tourism in India and Europe in particular and other parts of the world in general.

Review of the Existing Landscape of Holy Springs as a Resource for Religious Tourism

Visiting religious and pilgrimage sites has been a practice for ages (Kociyigit, 2016). Pilgrimage sites can be either natural sacred sites or human-made ones associated with religious history or activities (Shackley, 2001). One type of important religious place is water springs (Liutikas, 2015). Spring water is considered sacred water, and sacred refers to those 'aspects of water through which mystery and unknown, or irrational elements become present to our awareness' (Haight, 1996:277). Sacred natural sites are defined as 'areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities' (Wild *et al.*, 2008:7). Springs are naturally attractive and associated with religious significance, particularly for the people living around them. Further, it is wisely observed in various cultures that springs share a common belief and special relationship with nature, due

to the medicinal and religious values attributed to them (Arvigo & Epstein, 2003; Khole, 2020). Travel motives such as worshipping Gods and Goddesses, participation in rituals, education curiosity (Butler & Suntikul, 2018), health and wellness, cleansing, solving fertility issues, healing and overcoming sin, sustaining religious identity (Olsen, 2012), miraculous power (Liutikas, 2015) were all quite common. Rituals vary from place to place, but typically, pilgrims either drink or touch the surface of the spring water (Foley, 2011).

Holy water springs are promoted as tourist objects or attractions in several places in contemporary times. For instance, plenty of water springs in Western Kazakhstan are developed for religious tourism, which includes recreational and educational motives (Akhmedenov, 2020). People often visit spring sites unintentionally due to their presence in natural surroundings with attractive landscapes. Buying religious objects and taking spring water in bottles to their homelands is also a common practice among tourists (Giuşcă, 2020). Unfortunately, increased tourism and inappropriate practices at spring sites are causing several negative impacts. Contamination and pollution due to tourist activities are only some examples (Klempe, 2015). In the literature, various studies examine and describe aspects of holy spring tourism in terms of purpose and motivations of travel, environmental impacts of tourism and tourist activities on water springs, and ecosystem services of water springs, in general.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used in the current study to explore the motivations and changing aspects of spring water tourism: (a) content analysis was carried out, and (b) semi-structured interviews were conducted at visitor sites in India and the Baltic States. In the first phase, content analysis was used as a qualitative technique for analysing and comprehending consumer experiences, which includes both the written content from websites, blogs, and records related to water springs. This material was catalogued alongside non-textual content including images and graphical objects (Assarroudi *et al.*, 2018; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Roller, 2019). Content analysis as a research method was applied in this study to evaluate the data in a systematic way, following the

Table 1: Details of Spring Sites: Location, Number and Mode of Semi-Structured Interview Methods

Name of the country	No of springs	Face to face interviews	Phone	e-mail
Lithuania	23	8	7	2
Latvia	246	183	123	63
Estonia	51	16	27	12
India	10	28	12	Nil
Total	330	235	169	77

approach used in several studies (Suneeth *et al.*, 2021; Hajli & Lin, 2014). Semi-structured interviews as a further qualitative research study is widely employed to identify research gaps and understand opinion on an intended study in detail (Gowreesunkar & Sotiriades, 2015).

Considering the uniqueness of the study objectives, this research applied an exploratory framework to make sure that all the relevant aspects were covered. Like several exploratory works in tourism research, this study also followed qualitative methodologies. Having applied an in-depth study of the literature, the authors found a scarcity of research examining the changing perspectives on using spring water as a tourism resource from the tourist and management or owner perspective. Moreover, in countries like India and the Baltic States, the absence of literature is even more evident. Furthermore, there is no comparative study examining this phenomenon.

India and the Baltic region were chosen in this project because the Baltic Latvian and Lithuanian languages are similar in certain aspects to Sanskrit, and there are also several similarities in the use of water springs. India and the Baltic States have been strengthening their relations in trade and culture in recent years. Keeping this in mind, an interview schedule was prepared with open-ended questions and shown to six experts in tourism to increase the validity of the questionnaire. Accordingly, the interview questions were finalised based on the experts' suggestions. Both online and offline formats of the interview questions were designed. The deployed mode was decided depending on the willingness, and convenience for the respondents, from May 2021 to April 2022. Interviews lasted from 10 minutes to 20 minutes. All the responses were entered into an excel sheet, which was exported into the MAXQDA 20 Analytics

Pro software. Responses were analysed separately for India and the Baltic States. A considerable number of studies in tourism use MAXDA to provide speedy and straightforward theme-based content analysis (Noorollahzadeh & Asadi, 2021; Seryczyńska & Duda, 2021; Bagadion & Capistrano, 2022).

Data from the ($n=481$) semi-structured interviews with visitors at various sites, in India and the Baltic States were obtained through face to face interviews, e-mail communication and mobile phone conversations. A detailed summary of the sites, and the mode of interviews in presented in Table 1.

The author from India is very familiar with their study sites, particularly Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, Vashisht and Manikaran in Himachal Pradesh, and Telangana, and conducted face to face semi structured-interviews at the sites, with tourists ($n=30$) and spring management authorities ($n=10$). The author from Latvia, visited several water springs in the Baltic and obtained responses ($n=440$) through face to face interviews ($n=207$), wherever he didn't meet anyone at the spring, he contacted the tourist centre and got contact details and conducted interviews over the phone ($n=157$) and through e-mail communication ($n=77$). Most of the Baltic responses were collected from tourists ($n=400$) but interviews were also undertaken with land owners and spring management authorities ($n=41$). In both sets of data collection, both male and female interviewees participated, consisting mainly of the age group between 30 to 60. Tourists frequently visit the spring sites in all seasons, accordingly data were collected throughout the year in different time periods.

Findings and Discussion

The first part of this section deals with content analysis on the use of holy water springs as a resource of religious tourism in India and the Baltic States, and the next part provides an analysis of the results of semi-structured interviews exploring participant perspectives on the use of holy spring as a resource for tourism.

Use of Holy Water Springs as a Resource of Religious Tourism in India and the Baltic States

As per the report of NITI Ayog, there are about five million water springs across India (NITI Ayog, 2021). The majority of the rivers in India have springs as their source of origin (Radhika, 2021). In Hinduism, springs have a long history and it is believed that they are endowed with sacred and healing powers. Due to this there is a long history of visiting water springs which are seen as pilgrimage sites (Singh *et al.*, 2021). It is observed that many Hindu temples were built at the site of water springs (Zenani & Mistri, 2006). It is widely assumed that people will be more conscious in their use of certain things that are associated with sacredness, thus the spring ecosystems are largely undisturbed and well-protected. It is mentioned by Morwanchikar in his book that

our ancestors avoided pollution and misuse of precious water by assigning divinity to it, proving their social commitment to water (Morwanchikar, 2009:12).

The use of springs in the context of religious tourism is examined by various scholars in India. Uses include dipping or taking a bath in hot water springs, drinking spring water, sprinkling the body with water with a belief that it will lead to fulfilling a wish, overcoming sin and curing several diseases, and so on (Bhutiani *et al.*, 2016). In several places, the construction of gardens and the creation of infrastructure with beautiful landscapes are aspects associated with spring-based religious tourism developments and also for the purpose of conservation of springs. Tourists and modern pilgrims not only drink spring water at the sites but also expect to carry water from the site in a bottle to share with family members and friends (Singh, 2004).

In several parts of India, due to the increased demand for visits to the springs and their surroundings by religious and non-religious tourists, there are several developments such as the construction of hostels, the development of infrastructure, and the provision of improved hospitality services. For example, the Odisha tourism department has developed a resort near the water springs at Atri and Taptapani with a hot water bath facility (Mahala, 2019).

In Europe, spring sources are protected as a very important elements of the ecosystem and their use and management is regulated by the directives of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, as well as the laws of Latvia and other national countries. Various authors have researched

Figure 1: Water Springs in India
Hot Water Springs in Atri (left) and Taptapani (right)



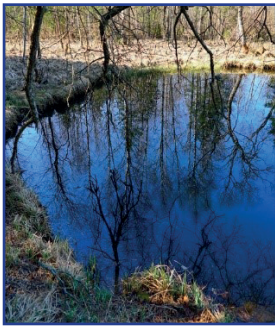
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atri_\(hot_spring\)#/media/File:Main_Gate,_Hot_Spring,_Atri,_Khordha,_Odisha_-1-3.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atri_(hot_spring)#/media/File:Main_Gate,_Hot_Spring,_Atri,_Khordha,_Odisha_-1-3.jpg)



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taptapani#/media/File:Brahmana_performing_puja_Taptapani_Orissa.JPG

Figure 2: Springs in Estonia

Siniallikas, Viljandi (left); Tuhala Nõiakaev or Tuhala Witch's Well, (centre) Saula Siniallikad (right)



Photos by Jānis Bikše.

the symbolic and spiritual significance of water springs. For example, J. Lautenbahs (1915) undertook extensive comparative research of Latvian mythology, looking for parallels in Latvian and Lithuanian folk songs, legends and speeches. One hundred years ago, O. Loritss (1938) studied the comparison of Livonian-Latvian folklore. In Estonia, T. Tamla (1985), who wrote a diploma thesis on them in 1974 and began to study the springs in Estonia. Unfortunately, during USSR control, research on sacred heritage was not supported, and it was not until 1985 that Tamla managed to publish a short article (1985) on his research, which lists 416 sacred springs. Adding data from the Estonian archaeological site database, this figure would approach 580.

According to a contemporary researcher H. Valk (2020), the number of springs in Estonia is even larger. There are currently 5,000 to 15,000 registered springs in Estonia, of which 3 to 10 percent are ascribed with sacred or with healing abilities (Figure 2). This constitutes 1 holy spring per 90 km², which is less than in Ireland with its 3,000

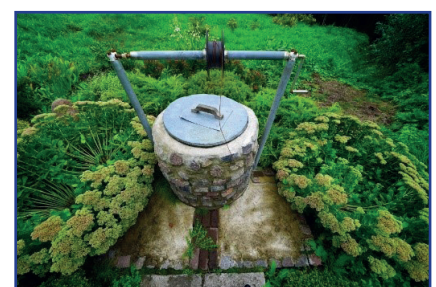
holy springs, but more than in Latvia (100) or Lithuania (150) (Valk, 2020). Liutikas (2020) provides an overview of springs and has classified them under natural objects as important pilgrimage places in Lithuania. In a study of sacred springs in southern Finland (Björkman, 2020), it was concluded that sacred springs are closely linked to human activity.

In 1732, there is mention of a cathedral which had a well with healing water, which was taken home by pilgrims (Paszenda, 2008). Similar miraculous healing springs, linked with Catholic cathedrals, can be found in Lithuania and Catholic territories in Latvia. The most famous in Latvia are the St. Magdalena (Madaliņa) Roman Catholic Church in Jersika Parish and Aglona Roman Catholic Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Figure 3).

Aglona Basilica, is the most important Catholic shrine in Latvia, and nearby is the ancient and miraculous holy spring, which seems to be historically justified. During

Figure 3: Catholic Springs

Aglona Basilica (left and centre) and Sacred spring of the church of Magdalena (Madaliņa) in Latvia (right)



Photos by Jānis Bikše.

Figure 4: Holy Springs

Rangavos Holy Spring in Lithuania (left) and Krokule Spring in Lithuania (right)



Photos by Jānis Bikše.

the reconstruction of the basilica, the sacred spring was also restored. It is easily accessible to many lovers of holy water.

In Lithuania, 'šaltinis' means cold water, and refers to water which 'boils' up at the source (Vaitkevičius, 2004; Vaitkevičius, 2020). A further belief is that water flowing to the east cures disease. In Lithuania, as in other Catholic countries, some water sources have acquired the importance of a Catholic shrine.

Rangavos Holy Spring in Lithuania (Figure 4) is a popular tourist destination. Krokule Spring in Lithuania is mentioned in a Christian legend, where Christ came to the shepherds in ancient times one summer morning, surrounded by the sun. The shepherds fell on their knees, Christ blessed them, but later the spring water where they fell began to show miraculous properties in healing various diseases.

The studies of J. Kursīte (1999, 2018) explored folklore related to springs over the last 30 years. This research presents springs as mystical places, places of Gods, important places in people's lives, which also symbolise special events. For example, swimming a foal in a spring is explained as making love. Latvian folklore, like any other folklore, is known for a variety of memories of ancient traditions. The springs are sacred, they must not be touched. The springs have miraculous abilities.

An example is Tirza Holy Spring (Figure 5), which has survived to the present day and is an archaeological monument of national significance (VKPAI 868) (Ministry of Culture, Latvia, 998). At the Cemetery of the Lords, opposite the church of Tirza, under a large, old elm tree, is a spring called the Fountain of Life. Some also call it the Spring of Health. In ancient times, this fountain was considered sacred. People thought that its water could cure various diseases, especially if it was drunk and used on Midsummer night. That is why there was a market around the spring on Midsummer evenings: the sick came from far away. Also, folk healers have led sick and weak horses and cattle around the spring; stripped the sick and sprinkled them with spring water. Some visitors took water in barrels and bottles to their house, others threw silver money into the spring. Once the landowner of Tirza forbade people to visit the spring. However, people's faith in this spring water was so great and so strong that they were not deterred (Šmits, 1925–1937).

The cult activities of the reservoir have been used since ancient times. This belief proves the sacredness of water in ancient times: one should not throw a stone or spit in the water, because then the world would throw stones at them and spit at them (Šmits, 1940-1941). Water, like wood and stone, received various donations - money, scraps, eggshells, hair. Special shrines and places of

Figure 5: Holy Springs as Tourist Attractions

The Holy Spring of Tirza (left) and Boleni Holy Spring (right) are a well-known tourist attractions in Latvia



Photos by Jānis Bikše.

healing were ancient sources of health. The spring was associated with vitality, clarity, fertility and abundance. The famous Tirza Spring (Figure 5), which has been greatly altered today, is often mentioned. Cult springs such as Baltiņi Holy Spring, Galtene Holy Spring, Krotēs Bruveru Spring, etc. are known in Latvia. Peculiar manifestations of neopaganism can be seen today at the Boleni Laima spring (Figure 5). A tall pine tree grows near Galtene Holy Spring, which used to be adorned with various items – donations for the use of spring water (Jurēvica, 1998).

During the amelioration of fields in 1963, the workers found several antiques. After archaeological research, it was concluded to be an ancient spring (now called Bruveri

Holy Spring), with a spruce tree growing next to it. More than 20 Curonian bronze antiques and animal bones were found at the site. Typically, some antiques were broken, some were warped by fire. These are all stored for exhibition in the Liepāja History and Art Museum. Historian, archaeologist P. Stepiņš dated the finds from the 10th to the 13th century. Records of tradition show that people in Latvia donated to this spring to become healthy (Figure 6). Legend has it that the spring water had healing properties and was very tasty. Back in the 1930s, people came to drink spring water. Money has been donated to sacred springs since ancient times in Latvia. The tradition continues today at Keveles Karalavots or Kevele Royal Spring and at Bolene Spring where ribbons are tied in the surrounding trees and shrubs.

Figure 6: Donations and Offerings at Springs

Keveles Karalavots or Kevele Royal Spring (left) and Bolene Spring (right)



Photos by Jānis Bikše.

Traditions at pre-Christian sources

The majority of Estonian holy springs (69 percent) are known for medical purposes, and more than two-thirds of them relate to eye healing (Tamla, 1985). Hence, for many healing springs in Latvia and Estonia, the title includes term ‘eye spring’ (Figure 7). H. Valk explains this: in the earlier centuries, the construction of many farmhouses did not include a chimney, which created a permanent smoke in the premises. This affected the eyes of people, whose condition could be improved by healing spring water (Valk, 2020).

Traditions of sacred springs of Orthodoxy

In Russian Orthodoxy holy springs have a very important place – springs are God’s medicine. They purify the soul in the clarity of spring water and help against various problems. You have to immerse yourself in the source three times covering your whole head. Since most holy springs have very cold water, there are no long water treatments, but every winter swimmer knows the short-term invigoration of the body. Varska Holy Spring in Estonia (Figure 7) was formerly known as the ‘Eye Spring’. It is now consecrated and serves the needs of the nearby Orthodox Church.

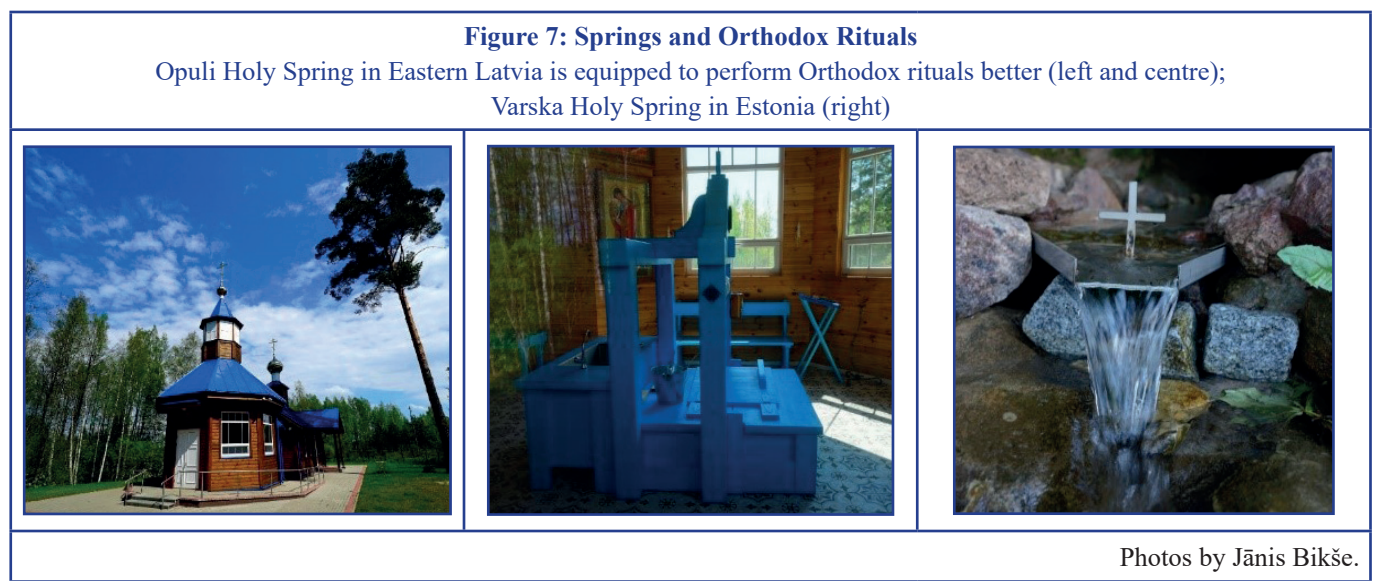
On the Cult of Fertility in Sacred Sources

Latvian folk songs talk a lot about the symbolic cult of fertility. In the quoted folk song (Table 2), getting drunk from a spring means making love. There are many folk

songs about the horse swimming in the water, including the spring. The horse here is male, the spring is female. In Hindu monuments, we find some examples related to this from about 5,500 km apart - the ‘1000 Lingas’ in Sahasraling in Karnataka, India, and Kbal Spean in Cambodia both display 1000 phallus (Lingas) cut in the water. The Lingas symbolise the masculine, the water feminine. They are dedicated to the god Shiva. Such places were created at spring water sites to enhance the ‘masculine power’ of their king.

Meitas mani krūmos sauca Zālītē vārtīties Zālītē vārtīties No avota nodzerties.	Girls invited me to the shadow trees To lie down on the grass To lie down on the grass Get drunk from the spring.
(LD 35018)	

In the case of the Baltic States, there are some symbols at Lielie Mulki Sacred Spring. The Christian faith either destroyed or transformed ancient symbols. Local researcher I. Logins has found several dozen phallic stones, both knocked over and relocated and used in construction. Legends and customs illustrate more about springs of the fertility cult. Thus, for example, the second most popular spring in Latvia is the Great Gutmanala. Belief in the area says that by drinking spring water, a person never grows old.



Perceptions on the Use of Holy Springs as a Resource for Tourism

The results of the semi-structured interviews with tourists shed light on their motivations, and the changing aspects of water springs as a resource of tourism in addition to their opinions on sustainable use and management of spring resources. Site owners or management were asked about changes in usage of water springs, issues, and the challenge of sustainable management of springs.

Tourist Motivations for Visiting Water Springs

In response to the question on motivations to visit water springs, in India, the majority (about 70 percent of respondents) mentioned that they are motivated to visit due to religious reasons, followed by 20 percent due to medical and wellness reasons and about 10 percent mentioned non-religious motives such as landscape, recreation, and history. However, the study results of the Baltic respondents were quite different from Indians. About 50 percent mentioned beautiful natural objects and landscapes, about 25 percent were interested to extract fresh water, but, only 10 percent were motivated due to religious and historical associations of legends followed by 15 percent with motives such as health, youthfulness, life expectancy, and so on.

Changing Aspects of Water Springs as a Resource for Tourism

While understanding the changing uses of water springs as a resource for tourism in the destinations, the results are different in India and the Baltic States. The majority of the respondents agreed that there is a change in terms of the use of water springs in both regions. In both locations, there is an increased number of visitors and an increased use of water resources as tourist attractions. However, the majority of the Indians are visiting springs for religious reasons. There are multiple reasons for visits in the Baltic States, as mentioned earlier.

While springs are protected and preserved for religious and wellness purposes in both countries, the number of visitors is high in India and very minimal in the Baltic States. However, there is an increased demand for bottled water in both study areas. Indian visitors mentioned that about 80 percent of them will take a bath or at least touch or drink the water due to religious beliefs and wellness

purposes. In India, one of the major issues was that there are increased numbers of visitors over the years and the water springs are the same in terms of the number, and size of the bathing tanks. Due to this there may be increased pressure and thus pollution over the years, however, people seek to follow the same practice due to their religious beliefs.

Most tourists in Latvia want to visit springs that are located in beautiful natural places and experience those places themselves. Some springs have created beautiful natural features such as caves or others limestone formations. It is important that these places (like their Indian counterparts) would preserve their ancient stories and tush maintain an undertone of mysticism.

Sustainable Use and Management of Spring Resources

There were a variety of responses from the two study areas to the topic of what the tourist industry and management should do to ensure the sustainable use and management of spring resources. The common responses from both study areas related to a need to provide instructions or a code of conduct that visitors need to follow at the water springs.

All respondents mentioned that the availability of spring infrastructure was important. In particular, those who were motivated by wellness and health reasons mentioned that the water sources with health and other attributes should have a good and hygienic water intake option. In recent times, in addition to safety, water quality analysis is also needed. Particularly, Indians mentioned that there is a need to create separate areas or development of infrastructure for bathing, as the number of tourists is increasing year on year and that will lead to high use of water for bathing and other reasons that may lead to pollution or degradation of water quality.

Solutions for the Sustainable Management of Spring Sources

The answers of semi-structured interviews conducted with spring site managers or land owners highlighted issues, challenges, and opportunities in the management of springs, and suggested solutions for the sustainable management of spring sources.

Interview results with landowners in the Baltic States revealed that about 60 percent of landowners do not want tourism at the water springs on their territory. However, about 40 percent of the landowners want to continue the use of water spring tourism in their territory as a means of making money, charging a fee or using the spring water by bottling it. In India, the spring management authorities (there were no private springs included in the Indian study) opined (about 75 percent) that considering the increased number of tourists, there should be infrastructure; there is a particular need to create separate areas for bathing, touching or drinking spring water. The issue of contamination and pollution can be overcome and if it is, visitors will increasingly take baths and participate in other activities like in the olden days. In India, the main issue is that the number of visitors is increased beyond the carrying capacity of the sites. However, about 25 percent mentioned that while various issues are evident, they are not a problem because religious belief will deal with the problem, and God will take care of it. In both study areas, there is a desire for the development of sustainable infrastructure at the water sites linked with responsible nature tourism activities.

Conclusions

The main aim of this comparative study was to understand the use of spring water as a holy water resources for religious tourism in the Baltic States and the adjacent territories, and in India. The use of water springs as a source of religious tourism has a very long history in India and the Baltic States. Tourists are motivated by spiritual, and religious reasons followed by medical and health purposes in both the study areas. However, in India, people are mainly visiting springs for religious purposes followed by recreation and health, while in the Baltic States religion and health have equal importance. This study substantiates the previous studies that the cultures from various countries of the world including the Baltic States and India, in a broad sense do share a belief in a special relationship with nature in the context of water springs resources (Khole, 2020).

People continue to visit holy springs and bring offerings. In India, spring water has a long history associated with spiritual, healing, and miracle powers. In several places, building temples near or around the springs is a common phenomenon from ancient times. Legends, deities, and

natural areas attract visitors with both religious and non-religious motives. Taking a bath, drinking spring water, and sprinkling on the body are common activities, as people believe it removes several ailments and provides better and improved health conditions. Socio-cultural and ecological association with springs by the communities around them is customary and they become conscious to conserve the water springs. In the recent past, in several places, there is improved infrastructure, and the development of hotels and other services is visible. However, tourism and irresponsible practices at water springs also impacts negatively, with pollution and contamination of water. This is a common problem in India and several places in Europe, and in this regard, it is important that spring management should examine the microbiological and chemical quality of the water of holy springs, and take necessary measures accordingly (Kirschner *et al.*, 2012).

It is important to raise awareness of the careful and precise use of water and sustainable management of sites. In order to reduce pressure on springs, particularly when multiple sources exist, recreational and nature tourism may be developed for the tourist / visitor motivated by the landscape, recreational tourism, and so on. For example, Western Kazakhstan has developed religious tourism with an emphasis on an excursion and educational orientation, to create awareness and recreational benefits (Akhmedenov, 2020). In India, particularly where there is a huge visitation to springs, separate tanks or bathing areas could be developed in a sustainable manner so that the several different purpose can be fulfilled at such sites (Del Río-Rama *et al.*, 2018).

Although this qualitative study attempts to quantify travel motivations and changing uses of spring water, it does not claim to be more than exploratory and could be an object of inquiry in future research covering various aspects of change in the use of water springs as well as the management of destinations. A further limitation is that the study was conducted at only a few destinations, with a small sample, using a qualitative approach. Each destination is different in terms of visitor demographics, destination characteristics, socio-cultural settings, and so on. Thus, there is scope in future studies to focus on quantitative research which would cover the diverse backgrounds of respondents in more detail.

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