

“THE POTENTIAL OF FESTIVALS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT – A STUDY ON DHANU JATRA IN WESTERN ODISHA”

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Abstract:

Tourist destinations are developing and promoting the cultural and heritage of the people as a means of attracting and enhancing visitor experience. This is also because cultural and heritage tourism is being used as a tool to boost local economy and has the potential to aid in the seasonal and geographical spread of tourism. Festivals are classified as a type of cultural tourism. Today festivals are considered to contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development wealth of the tourist's destinations. The festivals have major impact on the development of cultural tourism to the host communities. The festival organizers are now using the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events to attract visitors and creating cultural image in the host cities by holding festivals in the community settings.

The state Odisha is endowed with many cultural festivals. In order to promote tourism in Odisha, the Government has been giving special emphasis on rich cultural festivals of the state such as Rathayatra, Gotipua Dance Festival, Konark Dance Festival, Toshali National Craft Mela, International Odishi Dance Festival, Ekamra Festival, Rajarani Music Festivals etc. The tourism officials seem confident to attract more foreign tourists through these festivals. The present study focuses on Dhanu Jatra (Dhanu Yatra) in Western Orissa. Dhanu Jatra is a drama festival celebrated in western Odisha based on mythological story of Krishna, and his demon uncle Kansa. The study will explore how cultural tourism can be developed in Western Odisha through proper planning and promotion of Dahanu Jatra and the positive contribution that these events play in solidifying community relations with development of the cultural tourism.

Keywords: Festival, Cultural Tourism, community, planning and Dhanu Yatra

Introduction

Today festivals are considered to contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development wealth of a country. The festivals have major impact on the development of cultural tourism to the host communities. The festival organizers are now using the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events to attract visitors and creating cultural image in the host cities by holding festivals in the community settings. The desire for festivals and events is not specifically designed to address the needs for any one particular group. The hosting of cultural events is often developed because of the tourism and economic opportunities addition to social and cultural benefits. Many researchers have contested that local community can play a vital role in development of tourism through festivals.

As far as events and tourism is concerned, the roles and responsibilities of governments as well private sector and society in general have significantly changed over the last decade. The situation have been changed where the state had the key responsibility for tourism development and promotion to a world where the public sector is obliged to reinvent itself by relinquishing of its traditional responsibilities and activities in favour of both provincial/ state and local authorities. This indicates the growing influence on the behaviour of governments and business in general of development of event and tourism industries. This suggests that festivals impact on the host population and stakeholders in a number of ways which is primarily concerned with social and cultural, physical and environmental, political and economic impacts, and can be both positive and negative.

What are Festivals?

“An organized set of special events on a specific cultural man-made theme taking place on a specific day or period normally on a specific place gathering people in mutual and direct contact to the festival theme.”

The generic definition implies that management must always be included to have the festival organized as the definition includes the words ‘man-made’ and ‘cultural’. The fact that a festival normally takes place within the confinements of a specific geographical area implies that festivals normally include local stakeholders and that the stakeholders can come from both the private and the public sector as image, branding, and economic interests will be at stake for the local society. The short concentrated duration of a festival points to festivals as often being re-occurring events taking place annually, and often at the same time of the year.

Contribution of festivals to culture

There is a very close relationship between festivals and culture. Several researchers even include culture in the definition of “festival”. It has been stated that “Festival is a cultural event consisting of a series of performances of works in the fine arts, often devoted to a single artist or genre”. Social changes and globalization have been stated as the main causes for the rapid development of festivals during 20th century. These social, political, economic and demographic changes highlighted the need for redefinition and replacement of social identity to the social and cultural world map. Festivals were used as a means to this direction. The nature of festivals involves culture in their program in many different ways. Each element which is celebrated during a festival –regardless of its kind (music, film, art, etc.)– constitutes a part of the culture of a society, of an area or group of people. Hence, cultural impacts of festivals are notable and all elements interact with each other and offer a cultural experience. Festival implementation can contribute to a revival and conservation of local culture. It has been stated that local interest and willingness to participate in cultural experiences and local cultural activity (e.g. local artists) can be reinforced through festivals. Moreover, the introduction of new ideas leads to the expansion of the cultural prospects of a festivals’ attendees. So, festivals can be utilized as a tool for cultural development by local societies.

Contribution of festivals to tourism

The concept of “event tourism”, which includes “festival tourism”, came up for the first time during the 1980s.⁷ Researchers understood the necessity of studying this sector and tried to define and describe specific characteristics of this form of tourism which is related to special events and festivals.

Festivals also carry a positive impact in three parallel areas: attracting tourism, improving the place’s image and supporting the local community.

Attracting tourism

First and foremost, festivals are a great anchor for attracting tourism. While the destination is always available, having a time-limited event encourage visitors to take advantage of this opportunity and visit the place during the event. For example, although many people are interested in visiting Brazil, the famous carnival in Rio de Janeiro creates a feeling of unique chance, pushing potential visitors to take full advantage of the activities. Festivals are also a prime opportunity to get to know the local culture and experience the essence the place. During the event, visitors have a unique chance to interact with the local community, gaining a deeper experience of the ambience, customs and local culture.

Improving the place’s image

Along with tourists, festivals attract journalists and other opinion leaders. For these audiences, festivals are a ‘media-event’, generating an opportunity for a magazine or a news story. Such stories may be different from the destination’s typical media frame – i.e. the way in which it’s regularly covered in the news media. Such media events are expanding the place’s image and creating a window for positive media coverage. At the time of the festival, it is easier for destinations to demonstrate their positive facets, focusing the media’s attention on favorable occurrences. As part of getting ready for the festival, places

can also prepare for the expected media attention. That, including the preparation of media kits, press room and local guides to show guests around.

Support the local community

For the residents themselves, festivals are a unique occasion to celebrate the local culture and interact within the community. For the residents of Munich, for example, the Oktoberfest is a long standing tradition where they can meet their friends, take pride in the Bavarian culture and enjoy local dishes such as Wurstl, Brezn and Schweinsbraten. In the tourism context, festivals can boost the local community in two major ways. First, people of the local culture are being flattered by the international interest in their culture. This enhances the residents' pride and promotes the preservation and cultivation of the local culture. Second, the tourists and visitors are spending money within the community, enhancing the local economy and supporting restaurants, hotels and other tourism-related businesses.

An Overview to Cultural Tourism

Richards comments that the proposed definitions are "either too wide or too narrow to be of much practical use." Some of the definitions dealing with the subject view all tourists visiting cultural attractions as cultural tourists, without taking into consideration their main purpose of travel. Examples of this approach are the following two definitions:

"Cultural tourism encompasses all cultural activities undertaken by visitors and the supply of products for cultural visitors during their visit. The cultural 'activity,' which may consist of attending artistic or other events as a spectator or non-professional participant, visiting museums, exhibitions, etc., can be combined with other activities; nevertheless, the visit can be considered as part of 'cultural tourism.' Cultural activities may be undertaken with any main purpose of the visit, since any purpose of travel away from the usual environment can generate cultural tourism"

Other definitions are more focused on the motives of the tourists: "In the narrow sense, cultural tourism includes movement of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages" (World Tourism Organization)

A conceptual definition given by Bonink and Richards "The temporary movement of persons to a cultural attraction away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to satisfy their cultural needs".

Cultural tourism takes several forms. With the exception of pilgrimages, its main manifestations are either heritage-related trips or travel connected with present-day artistic creation. Several tourism researchers focus primarily on cultural creations of the past, while others emphasize contemporary culture.

Review of Literature

Festival tourism includes festivals, rallies, fairs, expositions, sports and cultural life, etc. It has various sizes, a specific theme and hold regularly or irregularly in the same region in a particular time, it can attract large number of tourists outside the region unlike conventional life line of people, events and programs (Lian, 2004).

Festival Tourism could be divided into traditional festival and modern festival according to its origins and activities involved. Traditional festivals are passed from generation to generation based on rich cultural heritage. On the other hand, festivals are planned entirely in line with market demand, based on local characteristics or consumer behavior (Huang, 2004). Based on Lian and Huang theories, a new concept of Festival Tourism was brought up by the two scholars. Festival Tourism, a kind of festival activity that has tourism value and has gotten certain tourism benefits, can bring significant economic, cultural and social benefits in a short period of time under a successful operation. Among these benefits, cultural function and economic function are enormous.

Culture is the soul of the festival and the economy is the life of the festival. These two aspects are interrelated. Festival Tourism plays an important role in the current tourism activities. Most people will especially travel to attend a festival.

Therefore, festival tourism activities can be arranged in a reasonable time so that it can help the area be one of top destinations. In the local culture, the Festival Tourism has played an active role to enhance urban functions and shape tourism image to attract tourists.

The festival as a tourism event also affects the cultural and social realm. On one hand, it can be instrumental in presenting local cultural traditions and customs to visitors, thereby preserving and diffusing the heritage. On the other hand, exposing local culture in order to attract visitors can similarly threaten continuity through pressures of commercialization (Saleh and Ryan 1993; Senior and Danson 1998; Waterman 1998). In many instances, promoting a local festival means conflicting effects across the different areas: a festival may generate economic benefits, enhance local quality of life, and create community social solidarity while simultaneously causing environmental damage, increasing traffic congestion, and perhaps adding to law enforcement costs (Syme et al. 1989).

In the past couple of decades the festival and event tourism has been one of the fastest growing sections of the world leisure industry (Getz 1991; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001) and has received increasing attention from the academic researchers. A majority of festival and event management studies have been conducted theoretical framework of travel motivation research (Backman Backman, Uysal & Sunshine 1995; Getz 1991, Nicholson & Pearce, 2001; Scott 1996). Uysal et al (1991), and later Backman et al (1995); attempted to examine the demographic characteristics, motivations and activities of tourists who went to festivals/ special event/ exhibition trip using the 1985 US Pleasure Travel Market.

Mohr et al. (1993) studied a hot balloon festival and identifies similar cluster of motivation subscales. Gold and Gold (2005:268) describe how the recognition of Greenwich as the fulcrum of the earth's time zones in 1884 inspired the hosting of year long festival intended to boost international tourism to the city. Adams(1986), as long ago as 1859, Handel Centenary Festival held in London's Crystal Palace was marketed as a tourist attraction with the organizers distributing 50,000 prospectuses in the European Offices of the railway companies serving the Crystal Palace. In a similar vein, Bonnemaïson (1990), argued that what the literature terms "the hallmark event" function like a monument, supporting and reinforcing the image of established power whether it is a religious or secular.

Festivals can have a significant impact on local community by providing the value added activities and spending outlets for locals and visitors by enhancing the image of a destination (Getz et al 2006; Grunwell and Ha 2007; Quinn 2006). The development of festivals is thus increasing regarded as a strategy for local economic development (Getz et al.2010) and greater place attachment. As a result, the festivals are becoming an important target of economic policies, and at regional and local levels, regeneration initiatives (Boo and Busser 2005; Waterman 1998).

Festival is an event made for the local community that attracts the wealth of tourism. Festivals are short-term events essential for cultural tourism (Chang 2006; Getz 2008). The latter have become the important in distinguishing from one tourist destination from another on the basis of cultural products (Getz 2008). Festivals are those events which are having a lot of Diversity and popularity (Getz 2008; Gursoy et al., 2006; Yang et al 2011).

Felsenstein and Fleischer (2003) evaluated the influence of Swedish and Turkish festivals on tourism promotion, using public assistance and visitor's expenditure as their control factors. These studies use either the tourist expenditures or tourist numbers to determine how events influence on the promotion of a city. A well- established and substantial international literature now attests to the significant impacts generated by the festivals across economic, political and socio-cultural domains (Arcodia and Whitford 2006). Growing awareness of these potential benefits particularly in economic and tourism terms has further propelled by a series of demand and production – side factors. On the demand side the socialization needs, the growth of serious leisure (Prentice and Andersen, 2003) and move towards the consumption of experiences (Getz 2008) have become important.

The potential of festivals in delivering series of development outcomes related to economic restructuring and revitalization, destination repositioning, inward investment and tourism revenue generation. Largely for these reasons, the public agencies in various special spheres have become increasingly active in supporting and sometimes organising art festivals. Thus art festivals as well as other types of events more generally have become part of a wide range of 'Cultural Strategies' (Shin

2004; Gotham 2005) used to generate and orient post-production economies towards consumption (Zukin1995) where leisure, entertainment and tourism underpin an 'experience economy'(Pine & Gilmore 1999).

Scope of the study

The study area is confined to Bargarh, is one of the thirty districts in Odisha and it is situated in its Western border in between 20°.20'.0" (North) latitude and 83°.37'.15" (East) longitude. This district is located towards the south of the river Mahanadi and the district headquarters is 330 KMs from Bhubaneswar by road. This district is famous in the World for its famous (Dhanu Jatra) Dhanu Yatra. Every year in the month of Sagittarius (Dhanu or Pausa) it is celebrated for eleven days of the month from the 5th day of the bright fortnight till the full moon day. The study highlights the tourism potentials of Dhanujatra in promoting cultural tourism so as to improve the image of Bargarh as a cultural tourism destination.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study include:

- To identify the contribution of festivals to culture and tourism.
- To find out the potentials of DhanuYatra in promotion of cultural tourism in Bargarah.
- To identify various shortcomings of DhanuYatra as a cultural tourism product and suggest appropriate measures so that it can contribute significantly for the destination.

Methods of Data Collection

The study involves collection of data both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected by interview with the organizers of the festival & other local people of Bargarh and the observation method. The secondary data has been collected from various books, magazines and journals relating to festival tourism, cultural tourism and also about DhanuYatra.

Festival Tourism in Odisha

Tourism in Odisha, India has grown considerably in recent years due to the various attractions of Odisha, ranging from wildlife reserves and beaches to temples and monuments and the arts and festivals. Tourism has been now recognized as an industry in Orissa and sizeable revenue is earned for the State from domestic as well as foreign tourists. The idea of tourism was first mooted by the Government during the 3rd Five Year Plan. It was revamped during the 5th Five Year Plan. The creation of Department of Tourism, Govt. of Orissa dates back to 1973.

Odisha being a land of ancient and sacred temples, and a state where three religions flourished, is thronged by pilgrims throughout the year. There are a large number of fairs and festivals celebrated in the state. There are festivals relating to each religion, tribal festivals, festivals relating to Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of the Puri Temple, and many seasonal exhibitions and fairs as well as special festivals such as the Konark Festival, the Rajarani Music Festival, and the Puri Beach Festival etc. Odisha is the bastion of rich cultural heritage with its historical monuments, archaeological sites, traditional arts, sculpture, dance and music. From the time immemorial Odisha attracts a large number of scholars, artists and tourists. For the development and promotion cultural tourism in Odisha, the Government has been giving special emphasis on rich cultural festivals of the state.

Dhanu Yatra as a Tourism Product

Dhanuyatra is a socio- religious festival having the rare distinction of an open air roving drama with no ceiling on dimension of stage, number of characters and also script. Some devotees of Lord Krishna started the first "Divya Mahotsava Dhanuyatra" in 1870 Shakabda Pousa Sukla Pratipada Sombar (Monday) dated 12.01.1948 at 12:00 noon and ended on Pousa Purnami Sombar (Monday) dated 26.01.1948 at 9:00 am.

“Dhanu Yatra” happens to be a great mass festival of Odisha which is based on the exploits of Lord Krishna. Every year in the month of Sagittarius (Dhanu or Pausa) it is celebrated for eleven days of the month from the 5th day of the bright fortnight till the full moon day. For this occasion the town of Bargarh becomes the city of Mathura, the river Jeera becomes the river Yamuna and Ambapali situated on the other side of Jeera becomes Gopapura. For eleven days the whole of Bargarh town is transformed into a very big stage even though the story of Kansa, his death and the exploits of Sri Krishna are enacted in 14 main places at Mathura and 4 main places in Gopa. This mass festival, took its full fledged shape in 1948 with the inertia of festive mood due to celebration of Indian Independence and victory over unjust British rule, symbolically shows the victory of Lord Krishna, the embodiment of truth, justice and righteousness over Kansa who personifies arrogance and wickedness. This festival has earned its fame in the World as much due to the separate stage along with movable stage used to show the mythological story as also due to the special involvement of the entire populace in the process. Therefore, this festival is rightly called the greatest play in the world enacted in the biggest open air theatre.

Dhanu Yatra is a theatrical representation of a Pouranic myth ‘Krushna Leela’. Various events, right from the wedding ceremony of Devaki with Basudeva to the fatal death of Kansa Maharaja as depicted in various Hindu scriptures are enacted to bring the old myth alive in different locations of Bargarh town and Ambapali village. In other words, the Krushna cult which has influenced many forms of folk dramas in different parts of India has not lost its spiritual content in case of Dhanu Yatra. In fact, Dhanu Yatra has placed Bargarh in particular and Odisha in general in the cultural map of the country. Various scenes are enacted in different places of Bargarh town and Ambapali village, instead of at one place. However, one beautifully decorated stage is erected in the heart of Bargarh town to project it as the Durbar of Kansa Maharaja. As per the tradition, one hired elephant is engaged for the movement of Kansa Maharaja. Female characters are performed by the male members.

The most important aspect of Dhanu Yatra is its largest cast and the people’s participation. The lead characters like Kansa, Ugrasena, Devaki, Basudeva, Krushna and Balarama are selected from amongst the local artists. Significantly, all the local residents as well as the guests and visitors who happen to be there are also taken as characters. Nearly everyone has a job to perform; each one has a role to play. Physical involvement of all present on the occasion is apparent. There is no denying that, Dhanu Yatra is of the people, by the people and for the people. Common people seem to have been elated and thrilled to the mythical age in body and spirit during the time of festival, though the duration of this festival is ten to eleven days only. It attracts a large number of crowds. The performances are so energetic and lively.

Dhanu Yatra also provides an opportunity to the local performing artists and other artists to exhibit their talents. The inhabitants of Bargarh have been watching this for years but they are not tired of it because it does not hamper their day to day life. Buses and trains ply as usual. Working class attends to their duties and offices as usual. Outsiders visiting Bargarh for the first time on this occasion become part of the festival without any obligation, without any compulsion. Undoubtedly, Dhanu Yatra takes up social causes and is respected for its strength of mobilizing the mass.

Apart from the action of mythological play the entertainment and trade based activities are the important factors for crowd localization. Though it is difficult to specify the activity zone in totality, still major localities can be identified for arrangement. There is no clear and exact magnitude of crowd which makes the planning a more difficult task. The George High school field is the centre of most of the activities of this sort. This is close to National Highway and at the same time approachable from different parts of the town. Mina bazaar with more than 100 stalls, Trade fair with around 50 stalls, Pallishree mela with around 50 stalls apart from other awareness activities and large number of food stalls attract the largest number of people to this field from 3.30 pm to 10.30 pm.

Discussion and findings

Festival Tourism is developing rapidly in Orissa. It plays a positive effect in integrating regional tourism resources and enhancing the popularity of a tourist destination. The festival is unique of its kind which has some special features that differentiate it from other cultural festivals of Orissa.

However, as every coin has two sides, there are several other areas of this festival which could be improved for its significant contribution to cultural tourism development of Bargarh. Orissa has become one of the world’s most-watched and hottest

inbound and outbound tourist markets. There is huge potential for organizing festivals which through continuous efforts will help in development of cultural tourism. The various weak areas of Dhanu Jatra festival are:

- There is a shortage of accommodations for the tourists in Bargarh and also there are no proper restaurants.
- The festival is not properly publicized to attract more the tourists.
- The roads connecting to different festival venues of Bargarh are very narrow and also not maintained well which causes over congestion during the festival.
- People will only travel to another place to attend a festival if they have a clear picture of its content and quality. However, the festival lacks its clear image and its contents.
- Artists invited to perform are not of high standard which fails to attract a more visitors.
- Lack of proper marketing of the festival.
- Most of the performances of the festivals take place in the evening and continues till late night. However there will be no transportation for the tourists for pick up and drop during that time.
- No proper steps have been taken by Orissa tourism for the development and promotion of this festival.
- No proper solid and liquid waste management system of the waste accumulated during the celebration.

Recommendations

- Bargarh is not only known for its Dhanu Yatra, but also it is well known for its other tourist attractions. The place requires good number of hotels and restaurants to cater the needs of the tourists during festival and also throughout the year. Establishment of homestay will enable the tourists to stay with the local people during the festival and to know and experience the local culture.
- The festival need to be publicized properly. There should be more promotions about the festival. The organizers could putup posters on the bus stations or even paint the advertisement on the bus. TV and newspaper are the common media for people, but more cutting-edgetechnology could be attached.
- The roads to the festival venues must be widened and maintenance work has to be undertaken from time to time.
- The festival does not have its clear image regarding its contents and its quality. Instead including a little of everything, A consistent central theme is needed that will serve as the programme's guideline.
- More attention has to be given on high standard of performance during the festival. Therefore, a high calibre of artists should be invited to perform, including both star performers and lesser-known artists from Orissa, India and abroad.
- Effective marketing of the festival is also required. Professional marketing strategies are needed in order to prepare and execute an integrated campaign for building both domestic and international attendance at the festival. This campaign should cover both the end consumers and the travel trade, i.e. travel agencies, tour operators and other allied organizations.
- Frequency of transportation services must be increased during the festival and there should be provision for the transportation during evening and night time for pick up and drop of the tourists.
- Department of tourism, Government of Orissa must take necessary steps for the development and promotion of this festival like other tourism promotional festivals of Orissa. Suitable brochures must be published about the festival. Well in advance, the festival must be included in the Orissa tourism websites which will help the visitors to plan their trip in advance.
- Strategic place should be identified for the disposal of solid and liquid waste. Local volunteers or NGOs should be involved in the functioning and monitoring of the system and make the festival environment friendly.

Conclusion

The festival tourism is one of the important parts in tourism industry. It attracts cultural tourists to local community events to promote cultural exchanges between tourists and resident. Tourism festivals have major effects on the local economy directly and indirectly that the spending by visitors on local goods and services by event-tourist has a direct economic impact on local

businesses and also passes the benefit more widely across the economy and the community. However, it must bring mutual benefits for both the hosts and guest. While festival tourism brings lot of socio-cultural economic benefits for the local community, at the same time efforts must be taken to improve various aspects of festival tourism in order to better showcase the local culture for satisfying the tourists. The study have found some of the weaknesses of the festival and have recommended some of the suitable measures, if are taken, this festival will help in boosting the tourism of Bargarh and enhancing its image as a cultural tourism destination.

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