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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION ASSOCIATED WITH TOURISM IN MEGHALAYA

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ABSTRACT

Corona virus or Covid-19 has affected the health of almost each and every corner of the people around the world and took away the lives of people throughout the worldwide without showing any partiality either to the rich or poor people. The pandemic which has started in wet market of Wuhan, China, gave rise and spread like a wild blaze to different ends of the earth not just affecting the health of public, but also affecting the social, political and most importantly on the economy of every country of the world. This paper examines to write specifically on how this deadly virus progressed slowly into the whole of a land and suddenly wrecked the economy which was contributed by Tourism industry in Meghalaya, India, which is known as one of the most famous tourist states in the lands of North East India and how the socio – economic life of the people who generated their income from tourism sectors has affected by this pandemic.

Keywords: Corona virus, Tourism Industry, Meghalaya, Lockdown, Indian Tourism

Introduction

A novel Corona virus disease or say COVID - 19 is a transmittable disease caused by a newly discovered Covid-19 emerged in Wuhan city of Hubei province of China from a sea market in the month of December, 2019 by health authorities in Wuhan city of the People's Republic of China. According to a journal Nature reported in the year 1968, the disease is called "Corona virus" because these viruses are the members of a previously unknown family of viruses which can only be identify only with the help of electron microscope and by doing so got their name by way it shapes under the microscope which resembles to an image of the crown where the word corona means crowns in Latin. The virus belongs to a huge family of

viruses which can cause dangerous illness depending from common cold to an intense acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 or the SARS – CoV -2. On 11th February 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) announced this disease as COVID – 19. Patients who are infected from this virus show the signs or symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath, breathing difficulties, fatigue, and Sore throat. The virus gets into the body of humans through the droplet transmission from the person who is already been infected from this disease. This same disease transmits from human to human through large respiratory droplets and direct or indirect contact with infected secretions.

Tourism is a main source of income, revenue and employment in many of the countries. The industry creates job opportunities, income, and development to destinations, tax collections and foreign exchange earnings. The tourism industry became highly competitive; and for this reason- forecasting of accurate tourism demand becomes important in order to create an appropriate strategic management and operational decision. Strategic decisions can be planning for opening attractions, accommodations, modes of transport, various activities, and tourism promotion for which heavy investment is required. On the other hand, operational decisions are the number of parking areas, number of shuttle buses, attendants, employees' hiring, and hours of service per day. Accurate tourism demand forecasting becomes a challenging task. Forecasting in tourism demand helps to identify the future design which guides in planning and policy formation. Forecasting plays as an important role in tourism planning. Moreover, accurate forecasting also helps the managers as well as the practitioners to make correct decisions in policy-making, pricing strategies, staff and capacity utilization and management, resource management ,and so on at the time of turmoil to decrease the risk involved and uncertainty.

In addition, we can say that many people are working related to this industry are losing jobs. In India around 38 million of people already lost their jobs in the travel and tourism industry. The landscape of travel and tourism in India has changed to a different level because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the study will review the income and employment generation of the people of Meghalaya that has been affected by COVID-19 relating to the travel and tourism industry.

Review of Literature

United Nations Conference on Trade and Conference, in its article “COVID-19 and Tourism” (2020) stated that “Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic industry and is an important driver of economic growth and development”. People of India, today are instantly moving from one place to another for leisure, recreational, trade, or family purposes.

H. Lalnunmawi on his paper “Development and Impact of Tourism Industry in India” (2019) stated that shortly India will be a tourism hot spot. The tourism industry includes the whole of an accommodation sector, airline industry, cruise line, sea transportation, entrainment sector, recreation sector as well as the

food sector. In India, the travel and tourism industry has been a great contributor to the GDP of the country creating many job opportunities and income to the people. A total of around 42 million people are involved both directly and indirectly until the year 2018.

According to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness report 2019 by the World Economic Forum, India has ranked 6th in the Asia Pacific region and 34th globally and also comes under the economic zone of earning high income. Other than the above mentioned economic growth in the tourism industry, the Indian tourism industry on the other hand, is also popular for its tourist's attractions in different ways. Tourists in India can enjoy different kinds of tourism or activities namely Eco tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, wildlife tourism, religious tourism, health tourism etc.

Sanjita Jaipuria in her paper namely "The impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector in India" stated that the Global tourism is affected by various types of innovative events, such as the 9/11 terror attacks, epidemic outbreaks like SARS-CoV-2, Ebola, Swine flu, and many more in the past. However, the recent epidemic outbreak (COVID-19) which was originated from Wuhan, China has heavily impacted almost every industry, including Tourism worldwide.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, (2020) around 75 million travels and tourism jobs are at risk globally, among which one in eight of them in India itself. The 21-days nationwide lockdown starting from 25th of March has suspended the whole of domestic flights, trains and inter-state buses, and has instructed all the Indians to stay at their homes respectively. The Government called for the adjournment of all hospitality services with exceptions, and as a result there occurred a decrease in the foreign tourist arrivals in India.

World Travel and Tourism (WTTC), (2020) on their report stated that 12% of the people in India belongs to Bangladesh, whereas the other 9% from the US, 6% from the United Kingdom, 2% of Canada, 2% of Australia and 69% from different other countries came to visit. On the other hand, tourism secretary Yogendra Tripathi had informed the parliamentary standing committee on transport, tourism and culture, that an estimated of 2 crore to around 5.5 crore people are directly or indirectly employed in the tourism sector in India and had to lost their job because to the COVID-19.

Dr. Amit Kumar in his research paper "Disastrous impact of Coronavirus (COVID 19) on Tourism and Hospitality Industry in India" (2020) explained that the tourism sector currently is one of the hardest-hit by the COVID-19 outbreak, with impacts on both travel supply and demand. The industry for a while is not searching for a donation however is hoping for a minimum support to survive by pushing back the repayment of installment's, some support for paying salaries and waiver in government levies.

Dr. Biswa Mohana Jena and Dr. Binita Nanda on their research “Impact of Covid-19 on Travel and Tourism Industry in India” (2020) stated that the Indian tourism and hospitality industry have reached as one of the important drivers of development among the services sector in India. In India, tourism has a potential to make a remarkable prospective by looking at the rich cultural, historical heritage, variety in terms of ecology, terrains and places involving natural beauty spread all around the country. India is the most connected advanced traveler nation when it talks about the digital tool which is used for planning and booking as well as an undergoing journey, growing middle class of India and increasing the incomes of people has carried on to push the development of both the domestic as well as an outbound tourism.

Dr. Sweta Bhattacharya on her paper “Challenges and Opportunities of the Tourism Industry 26 Amidst COVID 19 Pandemic”, (2020) stated that both the India’s as well the world’s tourism industry is affected mostly by the pandemic because the tourists are not allowed by the Government to visit any country. On the other hand, the hotels, restaurants, airlines, rail networks and also the cruise operations also stopped operating. This is leading to the development of impact on the GDP of the country as the virus was difficult to control from spreading. The Covid-19 is raising a global health alarm which is making the healthcare difficult to stable and impacting the economic breakdown of the activities.

The only way to stop the spread of virus is isolating each one from social gathering or masses, and isolate also confirms people for self-quarantine. This method needs an amalgamation of a strong and fit governance, use of existing technologies and the technologies that are yet to innovate, and a strong participation of community and solidarity.

The tourism industry has been hugely suffered by the COVID-19 pandemic but has also been presented with various opportunities to re-view and improve its practices. The necessity to improvise lies back with the interest to gain confidence and attract the attention of existing and future customers as well. The growth of the tourism industry is dependent totally on effective customer the desire to keep travel alive. Public relations and various other social media platforms have a huge potential in this to keep the travelers motivated, informed, and interested by marketing various aspects of travel destinations globally.

The lockdown period has increased the use of social media hence, creating an opportunity to inspire and motivate the travelers to become a part of such marketing strategies and start planning vacations once the lockdown is over.

COVID - 19 consequences in North East India’s tourism industry

Northeast India which consists of 8 states:

Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Sikkim experienced a pathway of trouble and difficulties at the time of COVID - 19 pandemic. As soon as the high alert on the

danger and spread of the virus was announced by the central government of India, all the respective governments of each and every states and territories took a careful initiative measures with the aim to protect the people from risks and danger. All the state borders were closed, interstate movement has stopped and commercial trade centers were completely locked down. The only chaos was to stay at home in order to prevent their own health, and going out only in case of emergency situation. The economies of every state came down below the actual position. The North East state of Sikkim which is known for its natural beauties and wild life varieties which has attracted as many as 20 million tourists in a year was economically affected as this state rely its economy heavily on tourism.

P. Nayak and S.K. Mishra on their paper “Problems and Prospects of Promoting Tourism in Meghalaya” published on (2020) stated that Meghalaya, one among the 8 states of North East India, covered by the state of Assam from North, East and Western part and by Bangladesh International Border in the South. Located between 26° 9’ 30” and 25° 8’ 28” north latitude and between 91° 9’ 0” and 92° 51’ 30” east longitude, it has the total area of only 22,429 square kilometers with a total population of 2,966,889 according to the Census of the year 2011 and 14,262 sq. km in area. The inhabitants of this land include the tribal groups of Khasi - Jaintias, the Garos, the Hajong, the Rabha and others. These main tribes are matrilineal society. Meghalaya was given with different names as the “Scotland of the East” and the “Abode of clouds” by foreigners during the colonial era. It was also well known as one of the famous Hill Station for the British in summer seasons especially during the early 19th century. This state has lots of similarities with Scotland’s nature and climate.

Nangtyngshain Hoojon, on his research “COVID - 19 and its impacts on Tourism in Meghalaya, India” (2020) summarized that Meghalaya’s villages of Mawsynram and Cherapunjee (Sohra) has hold the World Record of the “wettest place on earth” for many years as they experienced heavy rainfall and humid climate decorated with white clouds and fogs in all seasons of the year. The location as well as the charming climate conditions of the state itself, attracts many spelunkers and tourists to witness and experience the stunning and beautiful nature of the state.

Meghalaya, other than its cool climate and its dazzling views and rich traditions, is also richly blessed and enriched with the gift of nature which continued to draw the attention on people all around the world to visit this beautiful land of paradise. Every season of the year is the best time to visit for tourist. A small village called Mawlynnong in Meghalaya attracts many visitors and for many years the village holds the record of “cleanest village in Asia”. Not long ago it was found that the state has discovered around 1300 caves so far and many more needs to be explored and discover in the length and breadth of its southern part while sharing its border with Bangladesh. Furthermore, the longest caves in India such as Krem Liat Prah, Krem Chympha, Krem Kotsoti, and Siju cave in Garo Hills, etc. are found in the state of Meghalaya and around 20 deepest caves in India were also located in Meghalaya. Apart from that, the state offers a variety of other

beautiful spots like waterfalls and clear rivers, such as eco - parks, doubled Decker Living root Bridges, outstanding rock mountains and lush green valleys, beautiful dams and museums, etc. which attracts many wanderers, adventurers, tourists and visitor to explore and witness the beauty of natural glamorous land. No doubt it cannot hide the fact that; as in other places of different nations, tourism industry contributed much to the economy of the state of Meghalaya in many ways. It generate income and revenue, it creates employment and opportunities to many unemployed educated youths and women. Businessmen ran their business much better, indigenous arts and crafts were exported through tourism department. Traditional and cultural dresses and attires, arts and crafts were laid out in most of the tourist spots. Owners and employees of hotels, home stays, restaurants, tourist vehicles, etc. and most importantly, the street vendors and daily earn wages groups gained benefit from tourism industry.

Impact of COVID - 19 on tourism department in Meghalaya

There is no doubt that the state of Meghalaya depends on tourism because of its growth in terms of economy, and during the time of summers, the state becomes a popular destination for tourists. Thick jungles and green valleys, beautiful waterfalls, cloud kissing mountains and clear rivers are the sites to observe and experience the place, which tempts more than a thousand tourists every year.

With many people welcoming the 2020 New Year with joys and happiness, a full positive expectations and plans for their upcoming future, and then immediately something unplanned tragic was going to make an entry to the state. After the fast spread of Covid-19 to different parts of India, a national and uniformed lockdown was declared by the Government of India on 25th March 2020 which later extended for several months to fight and stop against the spread of unseen disease called Covid-19. The state of Meghalaya also, under the authority Mr. Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister o Meghalaya, followed the rules and regulations as given by the central government. No man is allowed to step outside of home for non essential things. However, in the middle of the battle, on the date of 14th April 2020 one patient was tested positive for COVID - 19 and the very next morning he died on 15th April 2020. This really incident has created a chaos of confusions and mental depression on the minds of many local people which eventually led the state government to further restrict the movement of people here and there around the land and even punished people who break the rules and regulations under the Pandemic Act. All men, either rich or poor, capable or not, have to stay at home and had to work from their respective home. Besides closing of the borders, commercial center, and all other tourist spots were closed. Meghalaya while facing its lockdown in order to stop the spread of this deadly virus has faces a huge fall down in the economy. With the empty streets, well known tourism places are left desolated making the shopkeepers, street vendors, vegetable sellers to face serious consequences with no place left to perform their economic functions especially to those less opportunities people who earn from hand to mouth. This placed thousands of people's livelihoods at risk.

The Times of India on their article "Shillong's Tourism Sector reels under COVID fear" published on (2020) stated that the tourism department in the state of Meghalaya is miserably affected amid Corona virus pandemic. It has a huge impact on the state as a whole. For the first time in so many years, it has been faced that Meghalaya have faced such a drop in footfall of tourist as the state seems to be surrounded by the tourists throughout the year regardless of any kind of internal crisis. However, nearly after 6 months all tourist spots, lodges and guest houses, restaurants and hotels wear a deserted look due to the pandemic crisis. However, when the pandemic later seemed to be fine and decrease in the case of Covid-19 positive, the state reopens its tourist destinations, hotels and restaurants earning an income to the state. But with arise of the second phase of the Covid-19; the state again has closed its borders for the tourist with the fear of this deadly spreading virus. No wonder it causes a financial ache on owners of restaurants, resorts, home stays, and tourist vehicles etc. that have financed their assets through debts, and would find themselves at the edge of insolvency. Through interviews with the stakeholders and manager of Tourist spots expressed their low feelings and experiencing economic loss due to decrease in a number of tourists.

The Shillong Times on their article "Pandemic takes heavy toll on lives and livelihoods in state" (2020) stated that COVID-19 has frightened the entire world and Meghalaya too has borne the brunt of the "Wuhan virus", which has brought life to a halt for six long months. The virus, other than infecting many people and causing deaths, has also affected normal lives of people and activities of people. From a legislator making policies in the assembly to a hawker selling betel nuts on the street for the purpose of survival to the police personnel investigating criminal cases, corona virus has spared none.

The pandemic no doubt has changed the entire world as well as the economy of India in a way that was never witnessed before. The recovery has to be in a steady and slow process and should be aligned to the recovery of the other sectors, in order to boost the economy of the tourism sector. Making sure the safety of the guest and the staff has become a major role of the industry. The hospitality sector should continue the cost-saving measures even when the demand becomes normal like the way it was, to recover the loss incurred in the year 2020 due to pandemic. The industry should promote flexible price, cancellation policy, refund policy, etc, to attract the targeted customers. To balance the losses the organization should take a strong marketing and promotional campaign on a national level and also globally to gain some confidence and build a positive image in the behavior of the targeted consumers.

Scope of the Study

The study covers the impact of COVID-19 on the income and employment generation of tourism industry of Meghalaya, situated in Northeast, India. The study covers how corona virus has affected the tourism industry of Meghalaya and its consequences that are being faced by the people of Meghalaya working or earning through the tourism sector. The study compares the number of tourist arrival from outside in

Meghalaya between the year 2020 and the past years. The paper also talks about the situation of tourism industry of Meghalaya stating how the state is looking forward in reopening of tourism sector and what new initiative will be taken by the Government in boosting the tourism industry of Meghalaya.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the effects caused by COVID-19 on Meghalaya tourism industry
- To find out the impact of COVID-19 on income and employment generation of the people of Meghalaya working on tourism industry
- To find out the decreasing rate of tourists in Meghalaya in 2020
- To identify the tourism opportunities in Meghalaya post pandemic
- To suggest few measures in revamping of tourism industry of Meghalaya in the coming years.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data in this paper is collected by using a mixed method of research designed to provide understanding of the research. In the present study, both primary and secondary data have been used on the basis of questionnaires, internet, magazines, journals, articles and news papers.

1. Research Design: conceptual research and descriptive research

2. Sources of data

- Primary Data
 - Collected using a survey conducted through the Questionnaires
- Secondary data
 - Articles, Research papers
 - Websites
 - Magazines and newspaper
 - Other specialized organizations

3. Data Analysis Method

The data analysis of this research is represented on qualitative manner. The data is gathered as mentioned earlier using a survey through questionnaires, various different articles, journals and magazines. As a result the analysis is qualitative analysis.

CONCLUSION

In Meghalaya the tourism department had experienced a serious phase of drawbacks and low income from 2019 onwards. The problem of the state is divided with the protests being held by the local people against the issue of Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) which was passed by the Parliament of India on 11th December 2019, which later named as Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). With the ongoing issue with the

bill passed by the Parliament, a new problem arises as the state announces long period of lockdown to protect the community from the spread of Corona virus. Facing the issue of Covid-19 was the biggest challenge to the state, to local and especially to the tourism industry of the state on which most of the locals depend for their daily income. Even though this pandemic is still on the limelight and many new cases are being detected each day, the outbreak of COVID - 19, can be seen affected to not only Meghalaya but to all over the states of India. Even after the vaccine to cure this deadly disease are being discovered and are the availability of the vaccine is going globally, a difficulty in saving lives of people can be seen due to its shortage and is also quite difficult to come back to normal life. Foreign as well as local people are facing trouble to plan a visit to the state and is struggling to have the courage to travel and make a visit to different tourist destinations in Meghalaya.

The government of Meghalaya has been trying and putting all its effort to boost the economy of the state and arrived at the conclusion that tourist spots will be open slowly and slowly based on the observations on the situation in the state. It is expected that the Ministry of tourism will provide new arrangements and guidelines for the tourists who would be visiting the state maintaining all the protocols, where it is necessary for a tourist to cover its mouth wearing a mask and sanitize their hands on a regular basis. Such rules can help the tourist to have courage to visit the destination and to also protect the tourists from such deadly disease and also to avoid the spread of such disease called Coronavirus or Covid-19.

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