Marketing Strategies for Tourism development in Varanasi: the Cultural Capital of India

Dr. Meghna Mishra
Department of Economics, Guru Nanak P.G College, Sunder Nagar Kanpur U.P.

Abstract

Varanasi is the capital city of the historical past or cultural capital of India, lying along the western bank of the Ganga River. The name of city becomes Varanasi because of two rivers the Varana River in the north and the Asi in the south is known as Varanasi (Varana + Asi). A myth establishes that the two rivers Varana and Asi are respectively originated from the right and left legs of Vishnu lying at Prayaga (Allahabad). Varanasi Also known as Banaras.

Key Words: Varanasi, Western Bank, Ganga.

Introduction

Varanasi the Cultural capital of India

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A myth establishes that the two rivers Varana and Asi are respectively originated from the right and left legs of Vishnu lying at Prayaga (Allahabad). Varanasi Also known as Banaras. The Buddhist literature like the Jatakas frequently referred to Varanasi as Banarasi or Banaras. It became more popular during the period of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605) as reported by Abdul Fazl, the court historian of the emperor (cf. Ain-e-Akbari, II.169, III.333). (1-4)

The name Banaras is still frequently used by the masses. In both Muslim and British India, the city was called ‘Banaras’. One of the etymologies explains the word Banaras as: ‘Bana’, ‘readymade’, and ‘ras’, ‘the juice of life’; thus Banaras means ‘the place where juice of life is always readymade’. For several thousand years, pilgrims have cleansed themselves of their sins here and sought release from the cycle of rebirth. Hinduism, deep and mystical, is perceptible everywhere in Varanasi like in a decorated doorway, in a glimpse of a sparkling temple, in the sound of a sacred bell, in the chant of the priests and in the fragrance of flower oblations.

The sense and spirit of holiness entrenched in Banaras has attracted people from various parts of world and religions like Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and even Muslim Sufis. For many of the adherents, this is a special place of pilgrimage. In the course of time, people from all parts of India came and settled here to have the experience of that spirit. Many foreigners from all countries also attracted to this old city. According to Richard Lannoy (2002), ...
“Banaras, in its incredible antiquity, belongs not just to Hindus, but to Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians. But it also belongs to everybody”. A sacred city dreamed into existence over the ages, it is also a state of mind. As an old saying puts it “Banaras is wherever you are”.

All the pan-India and regionally prominent sacred sites have been replicated in Varanasi. Mythological literature has been created to manifest the power of holiness in those sites, which finally resulted in making this city the ‘holiest’ for Hindus that preserved the ‘wholeness’. This together with the mixture of ethnic and social structure further helped in the formation of Varanasi as the ‘cultural capital of India’. The sites of the four dhams i.e. Badrinath in the north, Jagannath Puri in the east, Dvaraka in the west and Rameshvaram in the south — are re-established in Varanasi as Matha Ghat (Badrinath), Rama Ghat (Puri), Shankudhara (Dvaraka) and Mir Ghat (Rameshvaram). (5-7)

Other religio-cultural places of India have also been conceived in the different locations of Varanasi — Kedar Ghat, Mathura at Bakaria Kund or Nakh Ghat, Prayag (Allahabad) at Dashashwamedha Ghat, Kamaksha (Assam) at Kamachha, Kurukshetra at Kurukshetra Kund near Asi, Manasarovar Lake at Manasarovar near Shyameshvara, etc. The process of spatial transposition has promoted a sense of awakening and a notion of ‘national consciousness’ among the dwellers of Varanasi to perceive this city as a ‘mini-India’ or a ‘cultural capital of India’. Similarly other sacred centers are spatially manifested in Varanasi. There are also 12 churches, 5 Jain temples, 9 Buddhist temples, 5 Sikh temples (Gurudvaras) and several other sacred sites and places. This is the only place in the world where such a huge number around 3,300 Shiva lingas in the city including Jyotirling Kashi Vishwanath.

Banaras is mosaic of Indian culture, representing all the diversity and distinctiveness of the regional cultures of India. People from all parts of India, speaking different languages and dialects and carrying their own traits, taboos and traditions have settled in this city while preserving their own culture inwardly, and becoming part of the mosaic culture of the city outwardly. This synthesis of diversity in regional identity, language and tradition converges to form the personality of an all-India city, Banaras. Unity and integration among diversity and multiplicity are the unique traits this city presents. Mythology says that even those who came to disturb the city ended up settling here and became an integral part of its culture. Ultimately they accepted Lord Vishvanatha Shiva as their main deity. (3, 8-10)

**Tourism Potential in Varanasi**

The diversities, contrasts and distinctive features of Varanasi have played a major role in attracting tourists from various parts of India and from abroad. Varanasi is one of the top individual tourist destinations in India for international tourist after Taj second priority is Varanasi. Earlier Golden triangle was priority but after formation of Heritage Arc Varanasi become second destination which attracts international tourists. Like any other heritage city, Varanasi is also the product of a unique set of historical, cultural and functional circumstances and presents itself to particular group of people
(i.e. devout Hindus) as a distinct sacred place (for pilgrimage). Every year over 5.9 millions devout Hindus (domestic) pay a visit to this holy city and perform rituals and pilgrimages. The multiplicity and distinctiveness of this city has also attracted a huge mass of tourists. Arrival to Varanasi in recent years shows a continuous increase of national tourists/pilgrims and also of international tourists. In 2017 domestic 23, 39, 77,619 tourist, 35, 56,204 international tourist visited with 9.56% growth in domestic tourist & 12.65 % growth in international tourist in UP in compare to 2016. In 2017 the city recorded a little over 5.9 million tourists visited in Varanasi, up about 9% from 2016. Still the volume of domestic tourists in Varanasi is considerably high, as it is almost double to some states of India. Among the international tourists to the city Japanese maintains its predominance, although in percentile share it has tendency of decline. Due to long historical and cultural linkages, recognition of Buddhism and cultural ties the Japanese prefer to visit this city from where the first message of Buddha was proclaimed. Economic development and an increased Buddhist consciousness have encouraged pilgrimage to Sarnath and Varanasi from the Buddhist countries of Southeast and East Asia.

The city of Varanasi and its surrounding region (Kashi Kshetra) are visited by thousands of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims, Jains, Sufi saints and foreign visitors each day. Known the world over as the ‘sacred city’ and ‘the ancient most continuously living city’, Varanasi and its region is rich in architectural and cultural heritage (comprising tangible and intangible: temples, shrines, palaces, maths, mosques, ashrams, fairs, festivals, musical performances, wrestling traditions, handicrafts, silk weaving, sari, Rama Lilas), natural aesthetics (e.g. the crescent form half moon shaped northerly flow of the Ganga.

The local religious and cultural life of Varanasi together with its built architectural heritage and the natural landscape of the Ganga river constitute an immense resource for heritage and sustainable tourism, both Indian and foreign.

This city is very important, especially for pilgrimage tourism where the visitors enjoy morning boat ride, walk through narrow lanes (gali), visit Sarnath where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon and established his community (sangha). Sarnath is the second most important tourist attraction after the ghats of Varanasi. By attracting many tourists who are followers of Buddhism, Sarnath indirectly supports tourists’ growth in Varanasi.

In spite of rise of prices and lack of infrastructural facilities in comparison to the West, the quest for experiencing awe, wonder and the mystical image of India, the beautifully blended together ‘spirituality’ (yoga) and ‘materialism’ (bhoga) in Varanasi, the number of tourists from abroad has been constantly increasing. From last decade media, film, internet, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and websites have further strengthened the desire to visit this city. Another reason is economical flight fair and economical travel agency programmes.
Tourism Products in Varanasi
1. Pilgrimage Tourism / Religious Tourism
2. Medical Tourism
3. Rural Tourism
4. Adventure Tourism
5. Dark Tourism
6. Cultural Tourism
7. Cruise Tourism
8. Eco Tourism

Pilgrimage / Religious Tourism
For several thousand years, pilgrims have cleansed themselves of their sins in Varanasi and sought release from the cycle of rebirth. Hinduism, deep and mystical, is perceptible everywhere here: in a decorated doorway, in a glimpse of a sparkling temple, in the sound of a sacred bell, in the chant of the priests and in the fragrance of flower oblations.

The sites of the four dhams - Badrinath, Jagannath Puri, Dvaraka and Rameshwaram are re-established in Varanasi in at Matha Ghat (Badrinath), Rama Ghat (Puri), Shankudhara (Dvaraka) and Mir Ghat (Rameshwaram).

Other religio-cultural places of India have also been conceived in the different localities of Varanasi as Kedaranath at Kedar Ghat, Mathura at Bakaria Kund or Nakhi Ghat, Prayag (Allahabad) at Dashashvamedha Ghat, Kamaksha (Assam) at Kamachha, Kurukshetra at Kurukshetra Kund near Asi, Manasarovar Lake at Manasarovar near Shyameshvara, etc.

Kashi Vishwanath (Golden Temple-Jyotirlinga), Manas Mandir, Durga Mandir, Kaal Bhairav Mandir, Bara Ganesh Mandir, Tridev Mandir, Lakshi Mandir, Sarnath & around 3300 lord Shiva temples are major attractions for pilgrimage.

Apart from above reasons Varanasi attracts for Panchkoshi Yatra to pilgrims of different part of India as well as world.

Medical Tourism
In Varanasi Sir Sunderlal Hospital, Trauma Centre, Homi Bhabha Cancer hospital BHU, Indian Railway Cancer Institute & Research and many numbers of Private hospitals like Galaxy, Heritage, Apollo, Apex, Singh Medical &Research etc are main attraction for patients of the eastern UP, Western Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh & neighboring countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan etc. Per day thousands of patients from above places visit Varanasi for medical facilities. The Institute of medical Sciences, BHU will formally be upgraded to the level of all India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS). With up gradation IMS BHU will be entitled to get enhanced funding & better health care facilities.

Rural Tourism
Rural tourism means showcasing rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages, which have core competence in art & craft, handloom work, and textiles as also an asset base in the natural environment. The intention of rural tourism is to benefit the local community economically and socially as well as enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. (11-14) rural tourism not only generates revenue as well as spreads rural culture, living standards & bonding among village people with each other in any situations. Varanasi is known for Banarasi Sari, Handloom & craft work worldwide.
Varanasi’s carpet is demanded worldwide. Most of foreigner wants to see the rural life of Indians which attracts to them towards villages of India.

**Adventure Tourism**

Adventure tourism is rapidly gaining popularity in this tourist seeks different kinds of vacations. Adventure travel involves exploration or travel to remote, exotic areas. Any constructive activity which tests the endurance of both a person and his equipment to its extreme limit is termed as Adventure. It covers land, air and water based activities which include mountaineering, trekking, hand gliding, paragliding, bungee jumping and river rafting. It also includes facilities for trekking, rock climbing, mountaineering, aero-sports, winter/water related sports, treker huts, wildlife etc. In Varanasi Ganga Ghats & its long river front, Chunar fort, Ram Nagar fort, nearby locations Sirshi Dam, Lakhaniya Dari, Chandraprabha Century, Devdari, Rajdari are the main sites for adventure tourism.

**Cruise Tourism**

Cruise tourism is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing components of the tourism industry which is growing rapidly worldwide. It is fast emerging as a new marketable tourism product. Fabulous tourist destinations for cruise tourists are beautiful coastline, virgin forests and undisturbed idyllic islands, rich historical and cultural heritage. River tourism is also part of cruise tourism. In Varanasi site for cruise tourism are Assi Ghat to Raj Ghat (Ganga River front), Visualization of Ganga Arti & Raj Ghat to Markandey Mahadev (Kaithi). On 2nd September, 2018 a cruise service Alakananda launched by CM of UP, a 5-star kind luxury cruise service to show all 84 Ghats of Varanasi.

**Eco Tourism**

Fundamentally, eco-tourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life.

It is also the key to sustainable ecological development. Eco-tourism is more than a catch phrase for nature loving travel and recreation. Eco-tourism is consecrated for preserving and sustaining the diversity of the world's natural and cultural environments.

It accommodates and entertains visitors in a way that is minimally intrusive or destructive to the environment and sustains & supports the native cultures in the locations it is operating in. Responsibility of both travelers and service providers is the genuine meaning for eco-tourism.

**Wellness Tourism**

Wellness Tourism is about traveling for the primary purpose of achieving, promoting or maintaining maximum health and a sense of well-being. It is about being proactive in discovering new ways to promote a healthier, less stressful lifestyle. It is about finding balance in one's life. The Indian systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Yoga, Panchakarma, Rejuvenation therapy etc. are among the most ancient systems of medical treatment of the world are available in Varanasi attracts tourists toward Varanasi.
Cultural Tourism
Cultural Tourism is the subset of tourism concerned with a county or regions culture specifically the lifestyle of the people in that region, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religious & other elements that help their way of life. (15)

The life in Varanasi attracts millions of tourist towards it. Dev Deepawali, Ganga Arti, festival celebration in Varanasi, Subah-e-Banaras, Maha Murkh Smmelan, Ganga Mahotsav, Budwa Mangal are many more events which attracts millions of domestic as well international tourists towards Varanasi.

Dark Tourism
Varanasi’s Manikarnika Ghat, Harish Chandra Ghat are also famous for cremation of dead bodies with believe of “Kashi Marnam Mukti” ie. Release from the cycle of rebirth.
So people from different part of India as well world visit Varanasi for cremation for their relatives’ dead bodies & for related rituals like Tarpan, Pind Dan etc.

Marketing Strategy for tourism development in Varanasi
In spite of lots of tourism potential still tourism potential of Varanasi is unexplored so for proper utilization tourism potential we have to develop marketing strategies for effective utilization ample tourism potential of Varanasi. Tourism development in Varanasi is still in infant stage and there is need of formation of additional marketing strategies:-

- Strategies for better & effective use social media.
- Strategies for destination development & marketing of those destinations.

- Strategies for tourism product marketing & branding.
- Strategies for marketing channel establishment.
- Strategies for designing effective marketing campaign.
- Strategies for inviting private players for investment under PPP model in tourism industry of Varanasi.
- Strategies for inviting industrialist for investment in state under CSR initiative.
- Strategies for proper implementation of UP tourism policy 2016 with in target period (5 year).
- Strategies for convergence of schemes/Programmes/projects (HRIDAY, JICA, DIGITAL INDIA, AMRUT, SWATCH BHARAT MISSION & SKILL INDIA etc) in to UP tourism development schemes.
- Separate marketing strategies for domestic tourist & International tourist because difference in demographical profile & expectation.
- Strategies for inviting FDI in tourism industry of Varanasi.
- Strategies for World Bank funding for tourism development in Varanasi.
- Strategies for attracting different foundations, World Bank, Governments of different countries who have roots of religion (Buddha) in Varanasi for funding in UP(Varanasi) for tourism development in UP as JICA, Bill & Melinda Gates foundation funding different projects of UP.

Marketing Strategic Suggestion Related to Government Plans for Tourism Development in Varanasi
As we all are aware that government policies affect every Industry. Tourism
Industry is also not exception. For tourism development, government should take following actions:

1. Government of India launched smart city mission & selected 100 cities for development as smart city among 100 cites Varanasi is one among them so for tourism development in Varanasi there should be Convergence of schemes/ Programmers/ projects (hriday, jica, digital india, amrut, swatch bharat mission & skill india etc) in to UP tourism development schemes.

2. Appointment of tourism marketing officers who promote Varanasi tourism throughout years in UP, India & overseas.

3. Appointment of brand ambassador for promotion of UP tourism in India & overseas like Gujrat tourism department appointed Mr. Amitabh Bachhan Jee as brand ambassador for Gujrat tourism promotion.

4. Allocation of increased budget for tourism development of UP with special attention for Varanasi because if we compare with other state like MP & Gujrat it is less. Tough UP government paying attention for development of Kashi Vishwanath Corridor & Allahabad –Varanasi highway keeping the view of Kumbh in 2019.

5. There should be Integrated/ common plan of all departments for tourism development in Varanasi.

6. There should be mechanism for inter departmental issues solving.

7. Development of different Schemes for PPP model which can motivate stakeholders to invest in tourism development in Varanasi.

8. Development motivational factors for CSR initiatives for investment in UP. As we have visualized in Varanasi city Ghats of holy Ganga taken by leading business groups of India under CSR for redevelopment without disturbing their cultural heritage & archeological significance. As earlier DM of Varanasi taken initiative & invited leading businessman to adopt different location for development. We can see different location developed by corporate houses like Manikarnika Dwar by Rupa foundation but still there are thousands of locations which can be developed.

9. Development of different sources/models/ schemes for additional revenue generation.

10. Heritage Preservation with ICT enabled services.

11. Up gradation of UP tourism web-site regularly although department doing well in up gradation of UP tourism web-site but their need to development of other tourist destination pages in web site like separate page for Varanasi.

12. Physical implementation of conversed schemes on ground level & proper monitoring on time to time.

13. Balance between three tier system for tourism development in Varanasi & UP.

14. There should be establishment of R&D cell in tourism department of UP to explore actual potential of Varanasi & other tourist potentials of UP.

**Tourism Agreement with other countries**

As we know that most part of tourism revenue generated through foreign tourists
and tourists always travel in a friend country.

So it is duty of government to promote tourism by making good relationship with other.

Government has arranged to provide “Visa on Arrival” facility to number of countries citizen and Government has signed treaty to many countries also, but It is now a time to increase the horizons.

**Advertising in other countries and other state**

1. There must be some promotional activities in other countries and other state to promote tourism in the state.
2. There should be more emphasis on proper use of social media although department using Facebook, twitter, Google+, & You tube but still department not using WhatsApp as a medium for promotion of UP (Varanasi) tourism by creation of UP tourist group for domestic & International tourist.
3. There should be development of new advertisements of Varanasi tourism & use of TV channels for destination marketing as MP tourism department regularly advertise its important tourist destination on different TV channels (Star plus, Sony, DD national, Zee TV etc).
4. There should be more emphasis on rural tourism, Eco tourism, wild life tourism, MISE tourism, Nish tourism and adventure tourism to attract more foreign tourists.
5. There should be tourism awareness in local people.
6. Mega events such as Buddha festival, Visit India Year, Year for rural tourism, Explore pilgrimage & Eco-tourism should be much emphasized.
7. Varanasi should be promoted as a destination for International conference and conventions. As NRI Summit (Pravasi Bharatiya Divas) organized in January, 2019.
8. There should be research on tourism in which search of new tourist place and develop them is on major priority like Shultrankeshwar Temple, Chunar Fort, Rannagar fort, Pachkoshi Parikarma (Unique in World) & other destinations.
9. There should be development of Institutions providing knowledge in the field of tourism.
10. There should be sufficient information on website with regular update time to time with latest development.
11. There should be arrangement of special souvenir shop on exit places of tourist destinations.

**Proper maintenance of tourist centers**

There are many tourist centers which are not in tourist map due to improper maintenance. Government should take some action to improve the situation.

**Infrastructural facility development**

- **Road & Transportation facility development**
  1. Surface transport facilities have to be improved substantially in various respects. Coaches need to be imported from abroad on one time basis but more than that, the national highways have to be improved and at most places widened.
  2. State Government should change its attitude to taxing road transport agencies otherwise it will be
impossible for operators to run air-conditioned buses.

3. There should be Luxury/Semi Luxury buses for near by tourist centers like Allahabad, Ayodhya, Mirzapur, Gaya etc.

4. Air services should be revamped and so also the customs and immigration facilities which continues to be formidable for foreign visitors.

5. Network of trains should be widened and fast/super fast trains should be driven so that tourist can reach his destination early.

6. Some more special trains like ‘Palace on Wheels’ should be driven among tourist places.

7. There should be development of basic facilities in the water transport system also.
   There should pre paid auto/ taxi both at every tourist destination where pre decided fair should be charged. It is found in Varanasi non functioning pre paid auto taxi both is there at most of tourist destinations.

**Telecommunication**

There must be fast service in the field of telecommunication.

**Electricity**

To promote tourism, government should provide continuous power supply in Varanasi.

**Drinking water and Garbage**

There must be clean drinking water and clean and pollution free tourist places to promote tourism.

**Organizing Tourist fair**

In collecting primary data from domestic & international tourist, it is found that great charms for local and government promoted festivals among tourists. The state government is organizing many events in Varanasi but most of the time it looks formality only. There must be some serious efforts to make these events more glamorous.

**Suggestions related with private sector**

The following suggestions are given to private sector for tourism development.

**Guide facility**

1. There must be trained guide at every tourist centers to facilitate tourists.

2. There must be ‘Audio Guide Facility’ on important tourist places, monuments, historical places.

3. There should be trained and professional staff on enquiry centers of Hotels.

4. Where to go, how to go and where to stay etc. information should be made available

**Accommodation facility**

1. There must be better air-conditioning facility in star category hotels. It should be extended to non star category also.

2. There must be appointment of armed guards to protect tourists.

3. Tourists should also take care form mediators/brokers because they deceive tourists for their own benefits.

4. There must be list of approved and better tour operators on reception.

5. There must be proper training to Hotel staff and proper remuneration to them.

6. The number of hotels catering needs of middle class tourists should to be increased substantially.
7. There should be revision of room tariffs also.
8. There must be upgradation of services in hotels.

Package tours and sight-seeing
1. There must be proper arrangement of refreshment, lunch, dinner included in package tour which will certainly motivate tourists.
2. License system should be more generous to improve package tour services.
3. There must be trained guide with package tour which not only tell about places but motivate them also.

Suggestions related with public sector
The suggestions are as follows.
1. There should be special arrangement to provide information about public sector rest houses or hotels on airports, bus station, railway station, tourist information centers etc.
2. There should be signboards and hoarding indicating the rest houses.
3. There is “commission system” by small hotel operators to brokers, taxi owners, rickshaw pullers etc. This method can be utilized by public sector also to promote rest houses.
4. There should be mark of particular place on the decoration, Interior of tourist rest house to make tourist more enthusiastic and exciting.
5. Tourist rest houses should also arranged for sightseeing and package tour with the cooperation of transport department and the information with map should be provided to tourists.
6. There should be arrangement to provide full information about cultural programmes to tourists.
7. There should be armed guard to protect tourists.
8. The taxes (Sales tax, surcharge etc.) on foods, refreshment provided in restaurants should be terminated.
9. As domestic tourists travel more in religious places. These pilgrims are not very rich. For them government should arrange small rooms and dormitory on less charge.

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